

Short Story  
Masterpieces

# 5 RUSSIAN MASTERS

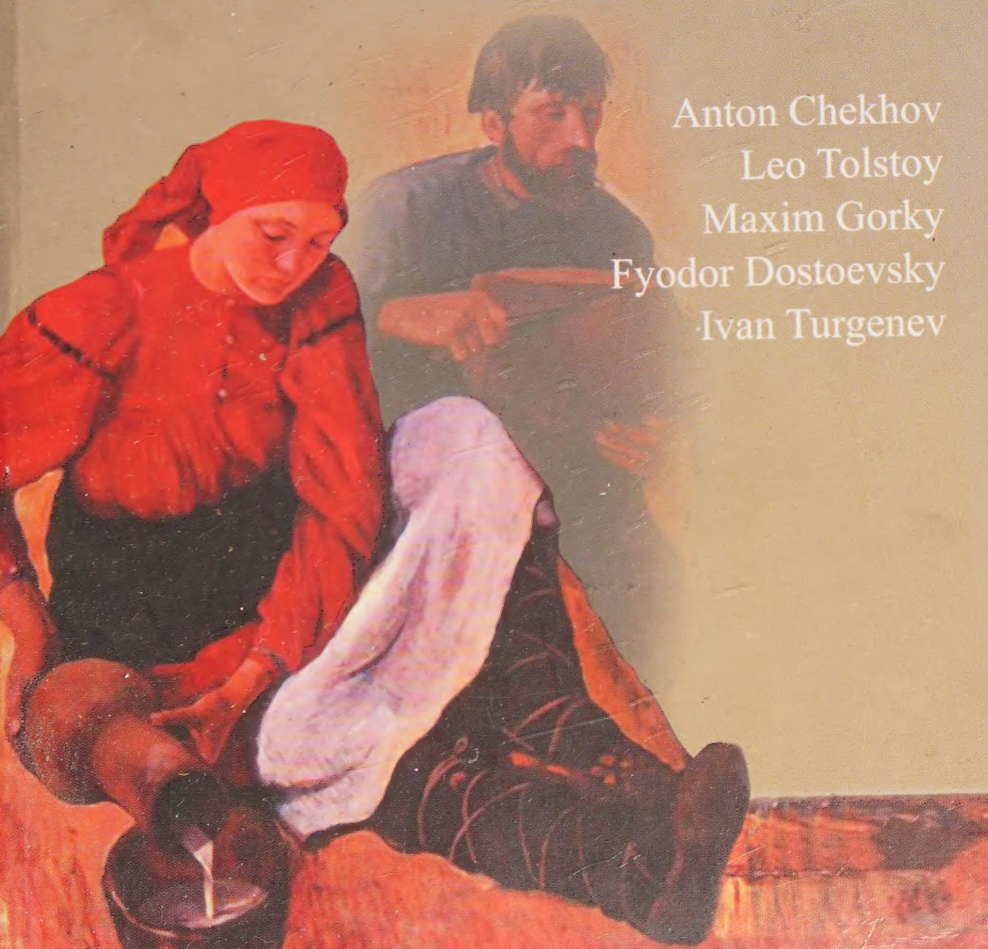
Anton Chekhov

Leo Tolstoy

Maxim Gorky

Fyodor Dostoevsky

Ivan Turgenev





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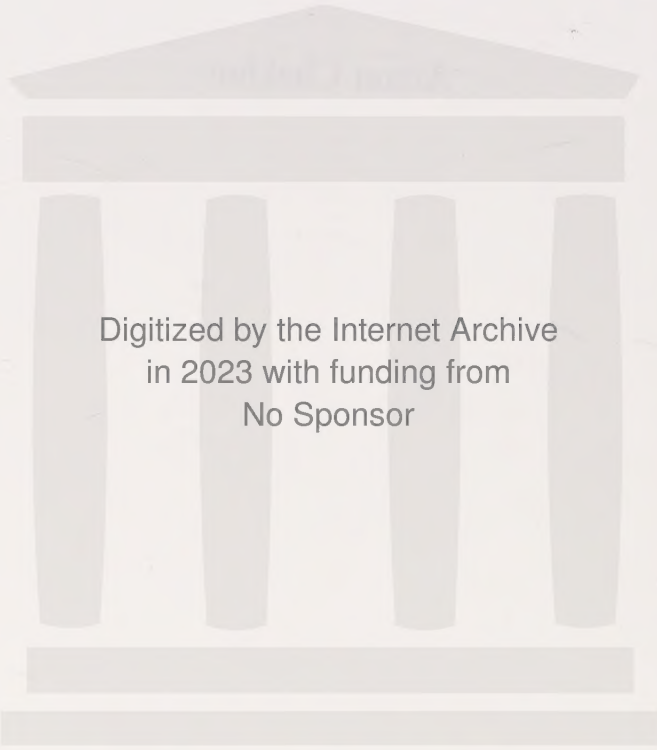
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## Anton Chekhov



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## Death Of A Clerk

It was an excellent night when the excellent clerk, Ivan Dmitrich Chervyakov,\* sat in the second row of the stalls, enjoying *Les Cloches de Corneville* with the aid of opera-glasses. He watched the stage and thought himself the happiest of mortals, when all of a sudden.... "All of a sudden" has become a hackneyed expression, but how can authors help using it, since life is full of surprises? All of a sudden, then, his face puckered up, his eyes rolled heavenwards, his breath was suspended ... turning his face away from the opera-glasses, he doubled up in his seat and—a-shoo! That is to say he sneezed. Now everyone has a right to sneeze wherever he likes. Peasants, police inspectors, even privy councillors sneeze. Everyone sneezes—everyone. Chervyakov felt no embarrassment, dabbed at his nose with his pocket handkerchief, and, like a well-bred man, looked round to see whether his sneezing had incommoded anyone. And then he did feel embarrassed. For he saw a little old man sitting in the first row, just in front of him, carefully wiping his bald cranium and neck with his glove, muttering something the while. Chervyakov recognised in the old man Civil General Brizhalov of the Ministry for Communications.

"I sneezed over him!" thought Chervyakov.

"He's not my chief, it's true, but still it's very awkward. I must apologise."

Chervyakov leaned forward with a little cough, and whispered in the General's ear: "I beg your pardon, Your Excellency,

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\* From the Russian *chervyak*, worm.—Tr.



I sneezed.... I didn't mean to. . . ."

"Don't mention it."

"Do forgive me. I . . . it wasn't premeditated!"

"Can't you keep quiet, for goodness' sake! Let me listen!"

Chervyakov, somewhat disconcerted, smiled sheepishly and tried to turn his attention to the stage. He watched the actors, but no longer felt the happiest of mortals. He was devoured by remorse. Walking up to Brizhalov in the interval, he hung about for a while and at last, conquering his timidity, mumbled:

"I sneezed at you, Your Excellency... Pardon me. . . . You know... I didn't mean. . . ."

"Oh, really ... I have forgotten it, must you go on?" the General said, his underlip twitching impatiently.

"He says he's forgotten, but I don't like the look in his eyes," thought Chervyakov, glancing distrustfully in the General's direction. "Doesn't want to talk to me. I must explain to him that I didn't mean to... that it's a law of nature, otherwise he might think I meant to spit on him. Even if he doesn't think so now, he might afterwards!.. .."

When he got home, Chervyakov told his wife of his ungentlemanly conduct. It seemed to him that his wife received his story with undue levity. True, she was alarmed for a moment, but finding Brizhalov was not "our" chief, she was reassured.

"I think you ought to go and apologise, though," she said. "Or he'll think you don't know how to behave in company."

"That's it! I tried to apologise, but he was so strange. Didn't say a word of sense. Besides, there was no time for talking."

Next day Chervyakov put on his new official frock-coat, had his hair cut, and went to explain his conduct to Brizhalov. The General's reception-room was full of petitioners, and the General himself was there, receiving petitions. After interview-

ing a few of them, the General raised his eyes to Chervyakov's face.

"Last night, in The Arcadia, if you remember, Your Excellency," began the clerk. "I—er-sneezed, and—er-happened to ... I beg. . . ."

"Pshaw, what nonsense!" said the General. "What can I do for you?" he asked, addressing the next man.

"Won't listen to me!" thought Chervyakov, turning pale. "It means he's angry... I can't leave it at that... I must explain to him. . . ."

When the General, having received the last petitioner, turned to go back to his private apartment, Chervyakov pursued him, muttering:

"Excuse me, Your Excellency! Nothing but my heartfelt repentance emboldens me to trouble Your Excellency..."

The General looked as if he were going to cry, and waved him away.

"You are laughing at me, Sir!" he said and shut the door in his face.

"Laughing!" thought Chervyakov. "I don't see anything funny in it. Doesn't he understand, and he a General? Very well, I won't bother the fine gentleman with my apologies any more. Devil take him! I'll write him a letter, I won't go to him any more! I won't, and that's all!"

Such were Chervyakov's thoughts as he walked home. But he did not write the letter. He thought and thought but could not think how to word it. So he had to go to the General the next day, to get things straight.

"I ventured to trouble you yesterday, Your Excellency," he began when the General turned a questioning glance upon him, "not to laugh at you, as Your Excellency suggested. I came to

bring my apologies for having inconvenienced you by sneezing.... As for laughing at you, I would never think of such a thing. How would I dare to! If we took it into our heads to laugh at people, there would be no respect left ... no respect for superiors....”

“Get out of here!” barked the General, livid and shaking with rage.

“I beg your pardon?” whispered Chervyakov, numb with terror.

“Get out!” repeated the General, stamping his foot.

Chervyakov felt as if something had snapped inside him. He neither heard nor saw anything as he backed towards the door, walked out into the street and wandered on. He stumbled mechanically home, lay down on the sofa, just as he was, in his official frock-coat, and died.

1883

## Chameleon

Police Inspector Ochumelov\* crossed the market-place in a new great-coat holding a bundle in his hand. After him strode a red-haired constable carrying a sieve filled to the brim with confiscated gooseberries. All around was silence.... There was not a soul in the market-place.... The open doors of small shops and taverns gaped drearily out at Gods world, like so many hungry jaws. There were not even any beggars standing near them.

All of a sudden the sound of a voice came to Ochumelov's ears. "So you'd bite, would you, you cur! Don't let it go, lads! Biting is not allowed nowadays. Hold it! Ow!"

A dog's whine was heard. Ochumelov glanced in the direction of the sound and this is what he saw: a dog came running out of the timber-yard of the merchant Pichugin on three legs, pursued by a man in a starched print shirt and an unbuttoned waistcoat, his whole body bent forward; the man stumbled and caught hold of the dog by one of its hind legs. There was another whine, and again a shout of: "Don't let it go!" Drowsy faces were thrust out of shops, and in no time a crowd which seemed to have sprung out of the earth had gathered around the timber-yard.

"Looks like a public disturbance, Your Honour!" said the constable.

Ochumelov turned and marched up to the crowd. Right in front of the gate of the yard he saw the above-mentioned indi-

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\* From the Russian *ochumely*; crazed.—Tr

vidual in the unbuttoned waistcoat, who stood there with his right hand raised, displaying a bleeding finger to the crowd. The words: "I'll give it to you, you devil!" seemed to be written on his tipsy countenance, and the finger itself looked like a banner of victory. Ochumelov recognised in this individual Khryukin,\* the goldsmith. In the very middle of the crowd, its forelegs well apart, sat the culprit, its whole body a-tremble—a white *borzoi* pup, with a pointed nose and a yellow spot on its back. In its tearful eyes was an expression of misery and horror.

"What's all this about?" asked Ochumelov, shouldering his way through the crowd. "What are you doing here? Why are you holding up your finger? Who shouted?"

"I was walking along, Your Honour, as quiet as a lamb," began Khryukin, coughing into his fist. "I had business about some wood with Mitri Mitrich here, and suddenly, for no reason whatever, that nuisance bit my finger. Excuse me, but I'm a working man.... Mine is a very intricate trade. Make them pay me compensation—perhaps I won't be able to move this finger for a week. It doesn't say in the law, Your Honour, that we have to put up with ferocious animals. If everyone's to start biting, life won't be worth living...."

"H'm... well, well," said Ochumelov severely, coughing and twitching his eyebrows. "Well, well ... whose dog is it? I shan't leave it at this. I'll teach people to let dogs run about! It's time something was done about gentlemen who are not willing to obey the regulations! He'll get such a fine, the scoundrel—I'll teach him what it means to let dogs and cattle of all sorts rove about! I'll show him what's what! Eldirin," he continued, turning to the constable, "find out whose dog it is, and draw up a state-

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\* From the Russian *khryu-khryu*—pigs grunt.—*Tr.*



ment. And the dog must be exterminated without delay. It's probably mad ... whose dog is it, I ask?"

"I think it belongs to General Zhigalov," said a voice from the crowd.

"General Zhigalov! H'm. Help me off with my coat, Eldirin. ... Phew, how hot it is! It must be going to rain." He turned to Khryukin: "One thing I don't understand—how did it happen to bite you? How could it have got at your finger? Such a little dog, and you such a strapping fellow! You must have scratched your finger with a nail, and then taken it into your head to get paid for it. I know you fellows! A set of devils!"

"He burned the end of its nose with a lighted cigarette for a joke, Your Honour, and it snapped at him, it's nobody's fool! That Khryukin's always up to some mischief, Your Honour!"

"None of your lies, Squinty! You didn't see me do it, so why lie? His Honour is a wise gentleman, he knows who's lying and who's telling a God's truth. May the justice of the peace try me if I'm lying! It says in the law ... all men are equal now. I have a brother in the police myself, if you want to know. . . ."

"Don't argue!"

"No, that isn't the General's dog," remarked the constable profoundly. "The General hasn't got a dog like that. All his dogs are pointers."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure, Your Honour."

"And you're right! The General's dogs are expensive, breed-dogs, and this one—just look at it! Ugly, mangy cur! Why should anyone keep a dog like that? Are you crazy? If a dog like that were to find itself in Moscow or Petersburg, d'you know what would happen to it? Nobody would worry about the law, it would be got rid of in a minute. You're a victim, Khryukin, and mind



you don't leave it at that. He must be taught a lesson! It's high time...."

"Perhaps it is the General's after all," said the constable, thinking aloud. "You can't tell by looking at it. I saw one just like it in his yard the other day."

"Of course it's the General's!" came the voice from the crowd.

"H'm! Help me on with my coat, Eldirin.... I felt a gust of wind. I'm shivery. Take it to the General's and ask them. Say I found it, and sent it. And tell them not to let it into the street. Perhaps it's an expensive dog, and it'll soon get spoilt if every brute thinks he can stick cigarettes into its nose. A dog's a delicate creature. And you put down your hand, blockhead! Stop showing everyone your silly finger. It's your own fault...."

"Here comes the General's chef, we'll ask him.... Hi, there, Prokhor! Come here, old man! Have a look at this dog . . . is it yours?"

"What next! We've never had one like that in our lives!"

"No need to make any more enquiries," said Ochumelov. "It's a stray. What's the good of standing here talking. You've been told it's a stray, so a stray it is. Destroy it and have done with the matter."

"It isn't ours," continued Prokhor. "It belongs to the General's brother, who came a short time ago. Our General takes no interest in *borzois*. His brother now, he likes...."

"What, has the General's brother come? Vladimir Ivanich?" exclaimed Ochumelov, an ecstatic smile spreading over his features. "Fancy that! And I didn't know. Come to stay?"

"That's right."

"Just fancy! Wanted to see his brother! And I didn't know. So it's *his* dog? Very glad! Take it ... it's a nice little doggie!

Snap at his finger? Ha-ha-ha! Come now, don't tremble! Gr-gr ... the little rascal's angry. . . . What a pup!"

Prokhor called the dog and walked out of the timber-yard with it. The crowd laughed at Khryukin.

"I'll have you yet!" Ochumelov threatened him, and, wrapping his great-coat round him, he continued his way across the market-place.

1884

## Vanka

Nine-year-old Vanka Zhukov, who had been apprenticed three months ago to Alyakhin the shoemaker, did not go to bed on Christmas Eve. He waited till his master and mistress and the senior apprentices had gone to church, and then took from the cupboard a bottle of ink and a pen with a rusty nib, spread out a crumpled sheet of paper, and was all ready to write. Before tracing the first letter he glanced several times anxiously at the door and window, peered at the dark icon, with shelves holding cobbler's lasts stretching on either side of it, and gave a quivering sigh. The paper lay on the bench, and Vanka knelt on the floor at the bench.

"Dear Grandad Konstantin Makarich," he wrote. "I am writing a letter to you. I send you Christmas greetings and hope God will send you his blessings. I have no father and no Mummie and you are all I have left."

Vanka raised his eyes to the dark window-pane, in which the reflection of the candle flickered, and in his imagination distinctly saw his grandfather, Konstantin Makarich, who was night watchman on the estate of some gentlefolk called Zhivarev. He was a small, lean old man about sixty-five, but remarkably lively and agile, with a smiling face and eyes bleary with drink. In the day-time he either slept in the back kitchen, or sat joking with the cook and the kitchen-maids, and in the night, wrapped in a great sheepskin coat, he walked round and round the estate, sounding his rattle. After him, with drooping heads, went old Kashtanka and another dog, called Eel, on account of his black

coat and long, weasel-like body. Eel was wonderfully respectful and insinuating, and turned the same appealing glance on friends and strangers alike, but he inspired confidence in no one. His deferential manner and docility were a cloak for the most Jesuitical spite and malice. He was an adept at stealing up, to snap at a foot, creeping into the ice-house, or snatching a peasant's chicken. His hind legs had been slashed again and again, twice he had been strung up, he was beaten within an inch of his life every week, but he survived it all.

Grandad was probably standing at the gate at this moment, screwing up his eyes to look at the bright red light coming from the church windows, or stumping about in his felt boots, fooling with the servants. His rattle would be fastened to his belt. He would be throwing out his arms and hugging himself against the cold, or, with his old man's titter, pinching a maid, or one of the cooks.

"Have a nip," he would say, holding out his snuffbox to the women.

The women would take a pinch and sneeze. Grandfather would be overcome with delight, breaking out into jolly laughter, and shouting:

"Good for frozen noses!"

Even the dogs would be given a snuff. Kashtanka would sneeze, shake her head and walk away, offended. But Eel, too polite to sneeze, would wag his tail. And the weather was glorious. The air still, transparent, fresh. It was a dark night, but the whole village with its white roofs, the smoke rising from the chimneys, the trees, silver with rime, the snow-drifts, could be seen distinctly. The sky was sprinkled with gaily twinkling stars, and the Milky Way stood out as clearly as if newly scrubbed for the holiday and polished with snow. . . .

Vanka sighed, dipped his pen in the ink, and went on writing:

“And yesterday I had such a hiding. The master took me by the hair and dragged me out into the yard and beat me with the stirrup-strap because by mistake I went to sleep rocking their baby. And one day last week the mistress told me to gut a herring and I began from the tail and she picked up the herring and rubbed my face with the head. The other apprentices make fun of me they send me to the tavern for vodka and make me steal the masters cucumbers and the master beats me with the first thing he finds. And there is nothing to eat. They give me bread in the morning and gruel for dinner and in the evening bread again but I never get tea or cabbage soup they gobble it all up themselves. And they make me sleep in the passage and when their baby cries I don’t get any sleep at all I have to rock it. Dear Grandad for the dear Lords sake take me away from here take me home to the village I cant bear it any longer. Oh Grandad I beg and implore you and I will always pray for you do take me away from here or I’ll die....”

Vanka’s lips twitched, he rubbed his eyes with a black fist and gave a sob.

“I will grind your snuff for you,” he went on. “I will pray for you and you can flog me as hard as you like if I am naughty. And if you think there is nothing for me to do I will ask the steward to take pity on me and let me clean the boots or I will go as a shepherd-boy instead of Fedya. Dear Grandad I cant stand it it is killing me. I thought I would run away on foot to the village but I have no boots and I was afraid of the frost. And when I grow up to be a man I will look after you and I will not let anyone hurt you and when you die I will pray for your soul like I do for my Mummie.

"Moscow is such a big town there are so many gentlemens houses and such a lot of horses and no sheep and the dogs are not a bit fierce. The boys dont go about with the star at Christmas and they dont let you sing in church and once I saw them selling fish-hooks in the shop all together with the lines and for any fish you like very good ones and there was one would hold a sheat-fish weighing a pood and I have seen shops where there are all sorts of guns just like the master has at home they must cost a hundred rubles each. And in the butchers shops there are grouse and wood-cock and hares but the people in the shop dont say where they were shot.

"Dear Grandad when they have a Christmas tree at the big house take a gilded nut for me and put it away in the green chest. Ask Miss Olga Ignatyevna tell her its for Vanka."

Vanka gave a sharp sigh and once more gazed at the window-pane. He remembered his grandfather going to get a Christmas tree for the gentry, and taking his grandson with him. Oh, what happy times those had been! Grandfather would give a chuckle, and the frost-bound wood chuckled, and Vanka, following their example, chuckled, too. Before chopping down the fir-tree, grandfather would smoke a pipe, take a long pinch of snuff, and laugh at the shivering Vanka.... The young fir-trees, coated with rime, stood motionless, waiting to see which one of them was to die. And suddenly a hare would come leaping over a snow-drift, swift as an arrow.... Grandfather could never help shouting:

"Stop it, stop it ... stop it! Oh, you stub-tailed devil!"

Grandfather would drag the tree to the big house, and they would start decorating it.... Miss Olga Ignatyevna. Vanka's favourite, was the busiest of all. While Pelageya, Vanka's mother, was alive and in service at the big house, Olga Ignatyevna used



to give Vanka sweets, and amuse herself by teaching him to read, write and count to a hundred, and even to dance the quadrille. But when Pelageya died, the orphaned Vanka was sent down to the back kitchen to his grandfather, and from there to Moscow, to Alyakhin the shoemaker. . . .

"Come to me dear Grandad," continued Vanka. "I beg you for Christs sake take me away from here. Pity me unhappy orphan they beat me all the time and I am always hungry and I am so miserable here I can't tell you I cry all the time. And one day the master hit me over the head with a last and I fell down and thought I would never get up again. I have such a miserable life worse than a dogs. And I send my love to Alyona one-eyed Yegor and the coachman and dont give my concertina to anyone. I remain your grandson Ivan Zhukov dear Grandad come."

Vanka folded the sheet of paper in four and put it into an envelope which he had bought the day before for a kopek.... Then he paused to think, dipped his pen into the ink-pot, wrote: "*GRANDAD*", scratched his head, thought again, and added:

*"KONSTANTIN MAKARICH THE VILLAGE"*

Pleased that no one had prevented him from writing, he put on his cap and ran out into the street without putting his coat on over his shirt.

The men at the butcher's told him, when he asked them the day before, that letters are put into letter-boxes, and from these boxes sent all over the world on mail coaches with three horses and drunken drivers and jingling bells. Vanka ran as far as the nearest letter-box and dropped his precious letter into the slit....

An hour later, lulled by rosy hopes, he was fast asleep.... He dreamed of a stove. On the stove-ledge sat his grandfather, his

bare feet dangling, reading the letter to the cooks. . . . Eel was walking backwards and forwards in front of the stove, wagging his tail....

*1886*

# The House with the Mansard

## An Artist's Story

### I

All this happened six or seven years ago when I was living in the province of T., on the estate of a landed proprietor called Belokurov, a young man who rose very early, went about in a full-skirted peasant coat, drank beer of an evening, and was always complaining that he never met with sympathy anywhere. He lived in an annexe in the garden, and I took up my quarters in the old mansion, in a huge pillared ball-room, with no furniture but a wide sofa on which I slept, and a table at which I played patience. All the time, even in still weather, the ancient stoves hummed, and during thunderstorms the whole house shook as if it were on the point of falling to pieces; this was rather alarming, especially on stormy nights, when the ten great windows were lit up by lightning.

Doomed as I was to a life of idleness, I did nothing whatever. For hours at a time I looked out of the window at the sky, the birds, the garden walks, read whatever the post brought me, and slept. Sometimes I left the house and roamed about till late at night.

On my way home from one of these rambles, I happened upon an estate I had never seen before. The sun was setting and the shades of evening lay over the flowering rye. Two rows of ancient, towering fir-trees, planted close together so that they formed almost solid walls, enclosed a walk of sombre beauty. I climbed easily over some railings and made my way along this

walk, my feet slipping on the carpet of pine-needles which lay an inch thick on the ground. It was still and dark but for the brilliant gold of the sunlight shimmering rainbow-like in the spiers' webs. The fragrance spread by the fir-trees was almost overpowering. I soon turned into a long avenue of lime-trees. Here, too, everything spoke of neglect and age. Last year's leaves rustled mournfully underfoot, and shadows lurked in the twilight between the trunks of the trees. On my right, in an ancient orchard, an oriole warbled feebly and listlessly—the bird, like everything else here, was probably old. And then the lime-trees came to an end in front of an old house with a verandah and a mansard, and suddenly I had a view of the courtyard, a big pond with a bathing-place on the bank, a huddle of green willows, and, in the midst of a village on the other side of the pond, a high, narrow belfry, the cross on its top lit up in the last rays of the departing sun.

For a moment I was under the spell of something familiar, something I had known long ago, as if I had seen this panorama before, at some time during my childhood.

A sturdy white stone gateway, adorned with lions, led from the courtyard into the open fields, and in this gateway stood two girls. The older of the two, slender, pale, very pretty, with a great knot of auburn hair on the top of her head and a small, obstinate mouth, looked very severe, and scarcely took any notice of me; the other, who looked extremely young, hardly more than seventeen or eighteen, was pale and slender, too, but her mouth was large and she looked shy, gazing at me from great wondering eyes and dropping out a word or two in English as I passed by; and it seemed to me that I had known these charming faces, too, at some distant time. I returned home, feeling as if I had had a delightful dream.

One afternoon, a few days later, Belokurov and I were walking about in front of the house, when the tall grass rustled beneath the wheels of a light carriage turning into the yard. In it sat one of the girls I had seen, the older one. She had brought a subscription list for aid to the victims of a fire. Not looking at us, she told us gravely, and in much detail the number of houses burned in the village of Siyanovo, the number of men, women and children rendered homeless, and the temporary measures proposed by the committee, of which she was a member, for rendering aid to the victims. After giving us the list to sign, she put it away and prepared to take her leave immediately.

"You've quite forgotten us, Pyotr Petrovich," she said to Belokurov, putting out her hand to him. "Come and see us, and if Monsieur N. (she named me) would like to make the acquaintance of some of his admirers, my mother and I would be very glad to see him."

I bowed.

When she had gone Pyotr Petrovich began telling me about her. He said she came from a good family, and was called Lydia Volchaninova, and both the estate on which she lived with her mother and sister, and the village on the other side of the pond, were called Shelkovka. Her father had occupied a prominent post in Moscow, and had died with the rank of privy councillor. Though quite well off, the Volchaninovs lived in the country all the year round, and Lydia taught in the Zemstvo school in her home village of Shelkovka, receiving a monthly salary of twenty-five rubles. She made this money suffice for her personal expenditure, and was proud to earn her own living.

"A very interesting family," said Belokurov. "We must pay them a visit. They would be very pleased if you went."

One day after dinner—it was some saint's day—we remem-

bered the Volchaninovs, and set off to Shelkovka.

We found the mother and both daughters at home. The mother, Yekaterina Pavlovna, must once have been good-looking, but had grown stouter than her age warranted, was short-winded, melancholy and absent-minded. She tried to entertain me with talk about art. Having learned from her daughter that I might visit Shelkovka, she had hastily recalled two or three landscapes of mine which she had seen at exhibitions in Moscow, and now asked me what I had intended to express by them. Lydia, or, as she was called at home, Leda, spoke more to Belokurov than to me. Her face grave and unsmiling, she asked him why he did not work in the Zemstvo, and why he had never been at a single one of its meetings.

"It's not right, Pyotr Petrovich," she said reproachfully. "Really it isn't—you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"Quite true, Leda, quite true," agreed her mother. "It's not right."

"Our whole district is in the hands of Balagin," continued Leda, turning to me. "He is the chairman of the local board and has put his nephews and sons-in-law into all the district posts, and does whatever he likes. We must resist. We young people ought to make up a strong party, but you see what our young people are like. It's too bad, Pyotr Petrovich!"

Zhenya, the younger sister, said nothing while the Zemstvo was being discussed. She took no part in serious conversation, not being considered as a grown-up person by the family, among whom she went under the childish pet name of Missie, because that was what she had called her governess when she was a little girl. She kept looking at me with curiosity, telling me all about the originals of the family album I was looking through. "That's my uncle ... that's my godfather," she said, touching the portraits



with her finger, her shoulder brushing artlessly against mine, giving me a clear view of her slight undeveloped breasts, her slender shoulders her plait, and her whole thin figure, tightly drawn in at the waist by her belt.

We played croquet and tennis, walked about the garden, drank tea, and afterwards sat a long time over supper. After the huge empty pillared ball-room I felt quite at ease in the comfortable little house in which there were no oleograph pictures on the walls, and they said "you" and not the familiar "thou" to the servants. Leda and Missie made the atmosphere seem pure and youthful, and everything breathed integrity. At supper Leda again talked to Belokurov about the Zemstvo, Balagin, and school libraries. She was lively, sincere, strong in her convictions. She was an interesting talker, though she spoke a great deal, and very loud—perhaps because she was accustomed to addressing classes. My friend Pyotr Petrovich, on the other hand, still clung to the habit of his student days—the habit of turning every conversation into an argument. He held forth listlessly, tediously, and at length, with an obvious desire to show off his intelligence and his progressive views. He gesticulated and knocked a sauce-boat over with his cuff, and a large pool formed on the table-cloth, but no one but myself seemed to notice it.

When we set off for home it was dark and still.

"Good breeding does not consist in not upsetting sauce on the table, but in not noticing if someone else does," sighed Belokurov. "Yes, they're a delightful, cultured family. I've lost touch with nice people—I've deteriorated. There's so much to do, so much!"

He spoke of the work to be done if you wanted to be a model landlord. And I thought what a lazy, unmanageable fellow he was. When he spoke of serious things he interspersed his

speech with painfully emphatic "er-er's" and he did everything in the same way as he spoke—slowly, always getting behind, never finishing anything in time. I did not believe he was a bit practical, if only because when I gave him letters to post he kept them in his pocket for weeks.

"And the worst of it is," he muttered, as he walked by my side, "you work and work, and meet with no sympathy from anyone. No sympathy whatever."

## II

I got into the habit of visiting the Volchaninovs. My usual place there was on the lowest of the steps leading to the verandah. I was devoured by remorse, deploring my life which was passing so rapidly and trivially, and continually telling myself that it would be a good thing if I could tear out my heart, which was such a heavy burden to me. And all the time there was talk going on on the verandah, the sound of skirts rustling, and pages being turned. I soon grew accustomed to the knowledge that Leda received patients, gave out books and went often to the village with a parasol over her uncovered head in the day-time, and in the evening talked in a loud voice about the Zemstvo and schools. Whenever this girl, slender, good-looking, invariably severe, with her small, daintily curved mouth, began talking about practical things, she would preface her remarks by saying to me coldly:

"This won't interest you."

Me she disliked. She disliked me for being a landscape painter and not trying to show the needs of the people in my pictures, and also because she felt I was indifferent to all in which she believed so firmly. I remember riding along the shores of the Lake of Baikal, and meeting a Buryat girl in a shirt and

blue denim trousers, riding astride. I asked her to sell me her pipe, but she only glanced contemptuously at my European features and hat, and, too bored to spend more than a minute talking to me, galloped past with a wild whoop. And Leda, too, felt there was something alien in me. She gave no outward signs of her dislike, but I could feel it, and, seated on the lowest step of the verandah, gave way to my irritation and said that to treat the peasants without being oneself a doctor was to deceive them, and that when one had any amount of broad acres, it was easy to be charitable.

But her sister Missie had not a care in the world, and, like myself, passed the time in complete idleness. The moment she got up of a morning she began reading, seated in a deep arm-chair on the verandah, her feet scarcely reaching the floor, or secluded herself with her book in the lime-tree walk, or passed through the gate into the fields. She read all day, scanning the pages avidly, and only an occasional weary and listless glance and the extreme pallor of her face showed that this reading was a mental strain. When I arrived and she caught sight of me, she would blush faintly, eagerly relinquish her book, and, fixing her great eyes on my face, begin to tell me what had happened since she last saw me—that the chimney had been on fire in the servants' quarters, that one of the workmen had caught a big fish in the pond, and so on. On weekdays she usually wore a coloured blouse and a dark blue skirt. She and I used to stroll about, pick cherries for jam or go rowing, and when she jumped up to reach a cherry, or bent over the oars, her thin, delicate arms showed through her wide sleeves. Or I would sketch, and she would stand by, watching admiringly.

One Sunday in the end of July, I set off for the Volchaninovs at about nine o'clock in the morning. I walked about the park,

keeping as far from the house as possible, looking for mushrooms, which were very plentiful that summer, and marking the places where I found them with sticks, so as later to gather them with Zhenya. A warm wind was blowing. I could see Zhenya and her mother, both in light-coloured Sunday dresses, coming home from church, Zhenya holding her hat on against the wind. Then I heard sounds which meant they were having tea on the verandah.

For a carefree individual like myself, always seeking an excuse to be idle, these summer Sunday mornings on our country-estates hold a special charm. When the garden, green and sparkling with dew, lies radiant and happy in the rays of the sun, when the oleanders and the mignonette in the flower-beds near the house spread their perfume, and the young folk, just returned from church, are having tea in the garden, and everyone is so cheerful and so charmingly dressed; when I remind myself that all these healthy, well-nourished, good-looking people will do nothing at all the livelong day, I long for life to be always like this. This particular morning I was thinking these same thoughts and walking about the garden, ready to stroll about aimlessly, with nothing to do, the whole day, the whole summer.

Zhenya appeared with a basket over her arm. Her expression showed that she had known, or at any rate felt, that she would find me in the garden. We gathered mushrooms and talked, and when she put a question to me she went in front, so as to see my face.

"There was a miracle in the village yesterday," she said. "Lame Pelageya has been ill a whole year, no doctors or medicine were any use, and yesterday a wise woman whispered over her, and she isn't ill any more."

"That's nothing," I said. "We ought not to look for miracles

only when people are ill or old. Isn't health a miracle in itself? And life? Everything we don't understand is a miracle."

"And aren't you frightened by things you can't understand?"

"No. I approach phenomena I don't understand boldly, I don't give in to them. I am above them. A human being should rate himself higher than lions, tigers and stars, higher than the whole of nature, even higher than things which we cannot understand and regard as miraculous, otherwise he is not a man, but a mouse, afraid of everything."

Zhenya supposed that, being an artist, I knew a great deal, and could divine accurately what I did not know. She wanted me to waft her to some exquisite eternal sphere, to that higher world where, she believed, I was quite at home, and she spoke to me of God, of life everlasting, of miracles. And I, unwilling to admit that myself and my imagination would perish altogether after death, would reply: "Yes, human beings are immortal," "Yes, life everlasting awaits us." And she would listen, believing me without demanding proofs.

As we were going back to the house she suddenly came to a halt and said:

"Isn't Leda splendid? I adore her and would sacrifice my life for her at a moment's notice. But why—" Zhenya put a finger on my coat-sleeve, "why do you always argue with her? Why are you so irritable?"

"Because she's wrong."

Zhenya shook her head disapprovingly, and tears came into her eyes.

"How hard that is to understand," she said.

At that moment Leda, who had just returned from somewhere or other, stood by the porch with a riding-crop in her hand—slender, pretty, lit up by the rays of the sun—giving or-



ders to a workman. She received two or three patients, in great haste, talking loudly, and then went from room to room looking extremely business-like and preoccupied, opening one wardrobe after another, and going to the mansard. They looked for her to call her to dinner for a long time, and by the time she came we had finished our soup. Somehow I recall all these trivial details affectionately, and I have the liveliest remembrance of this day, though nothing particular happened on it. After dinner Zhenya read, reclining in a deep armchair, and I sat on the lowest step of the verandah. Nobody spoke. The sky was enveloped in clouds, and there was a light drizzle. It was warm, the wind had long fallen, and it seemed as if this day would go on forever. Yekaterina Pavlovna, who was still heavy with sleep, came on to the verandah, holding a fan.

"Oh, Mamma," said Zhenya, kissing her hand. "It's bad for you to sleep in the day-time!"

They adored each other. When one of them went into the garden, the other was sure to appear on the verandah, and call out, her glance travelling among the trunks of the trees: "Cooee, Zhenya!" or "Mamma, where are you?" They always said their prayers together, and they were equally devout, understanding each other perfectly, even when they said nothing. And their opinions of other people were the same. Yekaterina Pavlovna very soon got fond of me, too, and when I did not come for two or three days she would send to know if I was well. She, too, inspected my sketches admiringly, and told me everything that happened as freely and frankly as Missie, not infrequently confiding her domestic secrets in me.

She went in awe of her eldest daughter. Leda had no caressing ways, and only talked about serious things. She lived her own special life and was for her mother and her sister the sacred,



somewhat enigmatic figure that the admiral, sequestered in his cabin, is for sailors.

"Our Leda is a fine person, isn't she?" the mother often said.

And now, while the rain fell gently, we talked about Leda.

"She's marvellous," said the mother, adding in conspiratorial undertones, glancing timidly around, "there are very few like her, but, you know, I begin to be rather alarmed. Schools, dispensaries, books—are all very well, but why go to extremes? She's nearly twenty-four, it's time for her to be thinking seriously about her future. All those books and dispensaries make one blind to the passage of time.... It's time for her to get married."

Zhenya, pale from her reading, her hair rumpled, raised her head and said, as if to herself, but looking at her mother:

"We are all in the hands of God, Mummie."

And plunged into her book again.

Belokurov appeared in his peasant jacket and embroidered shirt. We played croquet and tennis, and when it got dark, sat long round the supper-table, Leda again talking about schools and about Balagin, who had got the whole district into his hands. When I left the Volchaninovs that evening I carried away an impression of a long, long, idle day, and told myself mournfully that everything comes to an end in this world, however long it is. Zhenya saw us to the gate, and, perhaps because I had spent the whole day with her from morn till eve, I began to feel I should be lonely without her, to realise how dear this whole charming family was to me. And for the first time that summer the desire to paint a picture rose in me.

"Why should *your* life be so dull and colourless?" I asked Belokurov, as we walked home together. "*My* life is dull, boring, monotonous, because I'm an artist, a crank, I have been eaten up

with envy, remorse, and disbelief in my own work from my youth up. I shall always be poor, I am a tramp, but you—you are a healthy, normal man, a landowner, a gentleman—why is your life so dreary, why do you get so little out of it? What is there to prevent you from falling in love with Leda or Zhenya, for instance?"

"You forget I love another woman," replied Belokurov.

I knew he meant Lyubov Ivanovna, the woman who lived with him in the annexe. Every day I saw this lady, stout, chubby-faced, pompous, rather like a Michaelmas goose, walking about the garden, wearing Russian national costume and bead necklaces, always carrying an open parasol, and always being called by the servant to have a meal, or take tea. Three years before she had rented one of the annexes for the summer, and had remained there with Belokurov, apparently for the rest of her life. She was about ten years older than Belokurov, and kept him well in hand, so that before going anywhere he had to ask her permission. She often sobbed, in hoarse, masculine tones, and I had to send and tell her that if she did not stop I would give up my room; and then she would stop sobbing.

When we got home Belokurov sat on my sofa, thinking, his brows knitted, while I paced up and down the room, a prey to soft agitation, for all the world as if I were in love. I felt a desire to talk about the Volchaninovs.

"Leda is only capable of loving some member of the Zemstvo, somebody as keen on hospitals and schools as herself," I said. "But for a girl like that a man should be willing to walk about in iron boots, like the lover in the fairy-tale, not to speak of becoming a member of the Zemstvo. And Missie? What a darling that Missie is!"

With many an "er", Belokurov embarked upon protracted

reflections on pessimism—the disease of our times. He spoke confidently, and by his tone it might have been thought that I was arguing with him. An endless, monotonous, sun-bleached steppe is not more dreary than a single individual who sits in one's room talking and talking, as if he never meant to stop.

"It's not a matter of pessimism or optimism," I said irately. "The point is that ninety per cent of people have no brains."

Belokurov took this remark as a personal affront, and went away offended.

### III

"The Prince is staying at Malozemovo, and sends you greetings," said Leda to her mother. She had just come back from some visit and was taking off her gloves. "He was very interesting. He promised to raise the question of a medical post at Malozemovo at the next meeting of the council, but he says there's not much hope. Excuse me," she said, turning to me. "I keep forgetting this sort of thing can't be very interesting to you."

I felt a surge of irritation.

"Why not?" I asked, shrugging my shoulders. "You don't care to know my opinion, but I assure you this question interests me intensely."

"Does it?"

"Yes, it does. In my opinion a medical post is not required in Malozemovo."

My irritation communicated itself to her. Looking at me from narrowed eyes, she said:

"What is required then—landscape paintings?"

"Landscapes are not required, either. Nothing is required."

She had drawn off her gloves and was opening the newspa-

per which had just been brought from the post-office. A minute after she said quietly, obviously trying to keep her feelings under control:

"Last week Anna died in childbirth; if there had been a medical-aid post in the neighbourhood she would be alive now. I can't help thinking that even landscape-painters should deign to have some convictions in this respect."

"I have extremely definite convictions in this respect, I assure you," I replied, but she hid from me behind the newspaper, as if not wishing to hear me. "In my opinion medical-aid posts, schools, libraries, dispensaries only serve the cause of enslavement under existing circumstances. The people are fettered by heavy chains, and you do nothing to break them asunder, only add new links—there you have my convictions."

She raised her eyes to my face and smiled scornfully, but I went on, endeavouring to pin down my basic idea.

"What matters is not that Anna died in childbirth, but that Anna, Martha, and Pelageya must stoop over their work from morning to night, fall sick from onerous toil, spend their whole lives worrying over their hungry, sickly children, in fear of death and disease, dose themselves all their lives, fade early, age early, and die in filth and stench. As soon as their children grow up, they follow the example of their mothers, and hundreds of years pass like this, millions of people living in worse conditions than animals, merely to gain a crust of bread, to live in perpetual fear. And the true horror of their situation is that they never have time to think of their souls, of themselves as images of God. Hunger, cold, physical terror, perpetual toil are like snow-drifts cutting off all paths to spiritual activities, to everything distinguishing human beings from animals and making life worth living. You go to their aid with hospitals and schools, but this does not deliver

them from their chains, on the contrary, it enslaves them still more, since, by introducing fresh superstitions into their lives, you increase their demands, not to mention the fact that they have to pay the Zemstvo for their leeches and their books, and, consequently, to work still harder."

"I shall not argue with you," said Leda, lowering the newspaper. "I have heard all this before. I will only say one thing—one can't just sit and do nothing. True, we are not saving humanity and perhaps we make many mistakes, but we do what we can, and—we are right. The loftiest and most sacred task of a cultured person is to serve his neighbours, and we endeavour to do so to the best of our abilities. You don't like what we do, but one can't please everyone, after all."

"True, Leda, true," said her mother.

She was always timid in the presence of Leda, glancing nervously at her when she spoke, afraid of saying something foolish or inappropriate. And she never contradicted her, always agreeing with her: "True, Leda, true."

"Peasant literacy, books full of wretched moralisings and popular maxims, and medical-aid posts can no more lessen their ignorance or their mortality rate than the light from your windows can light up this huge garden," I said. "You give them nothing, merely by your interference in the lives of these people creating fresh demands, fresh motives for working."

"But goodness me, something must be done!" said Leda irritably, and the tone in which she spoke showed that she considered my arguments trifling and contemptible.

"People must be freed from heavy physical labour," I said. "Their burden must be lightened, they must be given a breathing-space, so that they do not have to spend their whole lives at the stove and the wash-tub, or working in the fields, but have time



to think of their souls, too, and of God, and get a chance to display their spiritual abilities. Every individual has a spiritual vocation—the continual search for the truth and significance of life. Free them from coarse, physical toil, let them feel that they have liberty, then you will see the mockery that these books and dispensaries really are. When a person feels his true vocation, the only things that can satisfy him are religion, science, art—and not such trifles.”

“Free them from toil!” mocked Leda. “As if that were possible!”

“Yes. Undertake some of their work yourself. If we all, town and country dwellers, all without exception, agreed to take our part in the labour on which the mass of humanity spend their time for the satisfaction of physical requirements, perhaps each one of us would not have to work more than two or three hours a day. Think how it would be if we all, rich and poor alike, worked only three hours a day, and had the rest of the time to ourselves! And think what it would mean if, in order to depend still less on our bodies and work still less, we were to invent machinery to substitute toil, and try to reduce the number of our requirements to a minimum! We would harden ourselves and our children, so that they need not fear hunger and cold, and we need not worry constantly over their health, as Anna, Martha, and Pelageya do. Just think, if we did not take medicine and did not maintain dispensaries, tobacco factories and distilleries—what a lot of spare time we should have as a result! We could devote this time in united work on science and art. Just as the peasants sometimes repair the roads in a body, we could, all together, by general consent, search for the truth and meaning of life, and -- of this I am sure—the truth would very soon be discovered, humanity would be freed from the perpetual, agonising, oppres-



sive fear of death—and even from death itself.”

“But you contradict yourself,” said Leda. “You preach science, and reject the idea of literacy.”

“The literacy which enables a person to do no more than spell out tavern-signs, and every now and then read books he cannot understand, has existed in our country since the time of Rurik; Gogol’s *Petrushka* has long been able to read, and yet the countryside is just as it was in Rurik’s time. It is not literacy that we need, but leisure for the full display of our spiritual abilities. It is not schools, but universities that we need.”

“You deny medicine.”

“Yes. It would only be required for the study of disease as a natural phenomenon, and not for its cure. If treatment is required, let it be, not of disease, but of its causes. Remove the main cause—physical labour, and there will be no more diseases. I do not recognise that science which aspires to heal,” I continued excitedly. “True science and art aim not at temporary, partial measures, but at what is eternal and general. They seek for the truth and meaning of life, they seek God, the soul, and when they are fastened down to the needs of the moment, to dispensaries and libraries, they can only complicate and burden life. We have plenty of doctors, chemists and lawyers, and there are plenty of literate persons now, but no biologists, mathematicians, philosophers, poets. Our brains, our spiritual energy, are wasted on the satisfaction of temporary, passing needs. . . . Scientists, writers and painters work with a will; thanks to them the comforts of life increase daily, our physical demands multiply, and yet we are far from the truth, and man still remains the most predatory, the uncleanest of animals, and everything tends towards the degeneracy of humanity as a whole and the irreparable loss of vitality. In such conditions the life of the artist is meaningless and the

more talented he is the worse and the more incomprehensible his function, since superficially it would appear that he works for the entertainment of a predatory, unclean animal, by supporting the existing order of things. And I don't want to work, and I won't.... Nothing is wanted, let the world rattle to smithereens...."

"Go away, Missie," said Leda to her sister, apparently considering my words unsuited to the hearing of so young a girl.

Zhenya glanced mournfully from her sister to her mother, and went away.

"People usually say nice things like that when they wish to justify their own indifference," said Leda. "It's much easier to deny the usefulness of hospitals and schools, than to cure and to teach...."

"True, Leda, true," said her mother.

"You say you will throw up painting," continued Leda. "Apparently you rate your work very high. Let's stop arguing, we shall never agree, for I rate the most imperfect of those libraries and dispensaries, you have just referred to so contemptuously, higher than all the landscape paintings in the world." And she turned abruptly to her mother, and began speaking in quite a different voice. "The Prince has got very thin and has changed greatly since he was last here. They're sending him to Vichy."

She talked to her mother about the Prince, to avoid talking to me. Her face was flushed, and to conceal her agitation, she bent low over the table as if she were short-sighted, and pretended to be reading the paper. My presence was evidently disagreeable to her. I took my leave and went home.

## IV

It was very still in the courtyard. The village on the other side of the pond was already asleep, not a light was to be seen, but for the pale reflections of the stars shimmering almost imperceptibly on the surface of the pond. At the gates with the lions Zhenya stood motionless, waiting to see me out. "They're all asleep in the village," I said, trying to make out her features in the darkness, but only seeing a pair of dark, mournful eyes fixed on my face. "The inn-keeper and the horse-thieves are peacefully asleep, but we, respectable folk, irritate one another and argue."

It was a melancholy August night, melancholy, because there was a hint of autumn in the air. The moon was rising from behind a crimson cloud, but it scarcely lit up the road, on either side of which extended the autumn fields. Shooting stars darted continually about the sky. Zhenya walked beside me along the road and tried not to look up, so as not to see the shooting stars, which for some reason or other frightened her.

"I think you are right," she said, shivering in the evening dampness. "If all of us, all together, were to devote ourselves to spiritual activities, we would soon discover everything."

"Of course. We are higher beings, and if we really appreciated the power of human genius and lived only for higher aims, we should at last become like gods. But that will never be—humanity is degenerating, and soon there will not be a trace of genius left."

When we were out of sight of the gates, Zhenya stood still and hastily pressed my hand.

"Goodnight," she said, shivering. She had nothing but a thin blouse over her shoulders, and cringed with cold. "Come tomorrow."

The thought of being alone, in this irritated state of dissatisfaction with myself and others, terrified me. I, too, began trying not to look at the shooting stars.

"Stay with me a little longer," I said. "Do!"

I was in love with Zhenya. Perhaps I had fallen in love with her for her way of meeting me and seeing me off, for the tender, admiring glances she cast at me. Her pale face, thin neck and arms, her delicacy, her idleness, her books, held a wistful appeal for me. And her mind? I suspected her of having an unusual brain, I admired her broad-mindedness, perhaps because she thought differently from the severe beauteous Leda, who did not like me. Zhenya liked me as an artist, I had conquered her heart by my talent, and I desired passionately to paint for her alone, dreaming of her as my little queen, who would, together with me, hold sway over these villages, fields, this mist, and evening glow, this countryside, so delightful, so exquisite, amidst which I had till now felt so hopelessly lonely and superfluous.

"Wait a little longer," I pleaded. "Only a few minutes."

I took off my coat and put it over her chilly shoulders. Afraid of looking funny and ugly in a man's coat, she laughed and threw it off, and I put my arms round her and began showering kisses on her face, shoulders and hands.

"Till tomorrow," she whispered, embracing me cautiously, as if afraid to disturb the stillness of the night. "We have no secrets from one another, I shall have to tell my mother and sister everything, immediately.... Oh, dear, I'm so frightened! Mamma's all right, Mamma is fond of you—but Leda!"

She ran back towards the gate.

"Goodbye!" she cried.

I stood listening to her retreating footsteps for a minute or two. I did not want to go home, and there was no reason for

going there. I stood deep in thought for a short time, and then sauntered slowly back, to have another look at the house in which she lived, the dear innocent old house, with its mansard windows looking down at me as if they were eyes, as if they understood everything. I passed the verandah, sat on a bench near the tennis-court, in the darkness beneath an ancient willow, and looked at the house from there. In the windows of the mansard, where Missie's room was, a light shone brilliantly, and then turned a sober green—someone had put a shade on the lamp. Shadows moved.... My heart was filled with tenderness, calm and content—delighted to discover that I was capable of falling in love—and yet at the same time I was worried by the thought that at this moment, a few paces away, Leda lived in one of the rooms of this house, Leda who disliked, perhaps detested me. I sat there waiting for Zhenya to appear, straining my ears, and it seemed to me I could hear talking in the mansard.

About an hour passed. The green light went out and the shadows could no longer be seen. The moon now rode high over the house and lit up the sleeping garden and deserted walks. The dahlias and roses in the bed in front of the house stood out distinctly, but they all looked the same colour. It grew really cold. I went out of the garden, picked up my coat from the road, and wandered slowly homewards.

When I went to the Volchaninovs the next afternoon, the glass door into the garden was wide open. I sat down on the verandah, hoping Zhenya would suddenly appear on the tennis-court, or on one of the paths, listening for the sound of her voice from the house. Then I went into the drawing-room and after that the dining-room. Not a soul was in sight. From the dining-room I made my way through the long passage into the hall, and back again. There were several doors opening into the passage, and



from one of the rooms could be heard the voice of Leda:

"The crow had somewhere found a bit of—" she was saying loudly, in a sing-song voice—dictating probably. "...a bit of cheese.... The crow— Who's there?" she cried suddenly, hearing my steps.

"It's me."

"Oh. Excuse me, I can't come to you just now, I'm giving Dasha her lesson."

"Is Yekaterina Pavlovna in the garden?"

"No. She and my sister left this morning on a visit to my aunt in the Penza province. And in the winter they'll probably go abroad," she added, after a short pause.

"The crow had . . . somewhere ... found ... a bit of cheese. . . . Written that down?"

I went into the hall and stood there, staring vacantly at the pond and the distant village, my ears still assailed by the words: "...a bit of cheese.... The crow had somewhere found a bit of cheese. . . ."

I went off the estate by the road I had approached it from the first time, but in reverse—from the courtyard to the garden, past the house, till I got to the lime-tree avenue.... Here a small boy ran after me and gave me a note. "I told my sister everything and she insists that we part," I read. "I had not the heart to grieve her by disobedience. May God send you happiness—forgive me! If you only knew how bitterly Mamma and I are crying."

Then came the fir walk, the broken railings.... In the field where the rye had been in bloom and the quail had given its cries, there now wandered cows and hobbled horses. Here and there on hillocks the winter crops showed green. A prosaic everyday mood enveloped me and I was ashamed of all I had said at the Volchaninovs', and once more life became a tedious affair.



When I got home I packed up my things, and left for St. Petersburg that evening.

I never saw the Volchaninovs again. Not so long ago I met Belokurov in the train on my way to the Crimea. He was still wearing his peasant coat and embroidered shirt, and when I asked him how he was, he replied: "Quite well, thanks to your prayers!" We had a talk. He had sold his estate and bought another, a smaller one, in the name of Lyubov Ivanovna. He could not tell me much about the Volchaninovs. Leda still lived at Shelkovka and taught in the village school. She had gradually contrived to gather round her a circle of people in sympathy with her ideas, and these composed a powerful party, and at the last Zemstvo meetings they had black-balled Balagin, who till then had kept the whole district in his hands. All he could tell me of Zhenya was that she did not live at home, and he did not know where she was.

I have begun to forget the house with the mansard, but every once in a while, painting or reading, I recall for no apparent reason the green light in the window, the sound of my own steps echoing in the nocturnal fields, that night I returned home, in love, chafing my cold hands. Still less frequently, in moments of loneliness and melancholy, I yield to vague memories, till I gradually begin to feel that I, too, am remembered, that I am being waited for, and that we shall meet. . . .

Missie... where are you?

1896

## The Man Who Lived In A Shell

**T**he sportsmen, overtaken by darkness on the outskirts of the village of Mironositskoye, decided to spend the night in a shed belonging to Prokofy, the village elder. There were two of them, Ivan Ivanich, the veterinary surgeon, and Burkin, the high-school teacher. Ivan Ivanich bore a strange, hyphenated name: Chimsha-Himalaisky; the name did not seem to suit him, and everyone called him simply by his name and patronymic—Ivan Ivanich; he lived at a stud-farm not far from the town, and was now hunting for the sake of an outing in the fresh air. The high-school teacher Burkin spent every summer on the estate of Count P. and was regarded by the inhabitants of those parts as quite one of themselves.

Neither of them slept. Ivan Ivanich, a tall, lean old man with a long moustache, sat outside the door, in the moonlight, smoking his pipe. Burkin lay inside, on the hay, concealed by the darkness.

They whiled away the time by telling each other stories. They spoke of Mavra, the wife of the village elder, a perfectly healthy and by no means unintelligent woman, who had never been out of her native village in her life. She had never seen a town or a railway, and had spent the last ten years sitting by her stove, only venturing out at night.

“Is it so very strange, though?” said Burkin. “There are plenty of people in this world who are recluses by nature and strive, like the hermit-crab or the snail, to retreat within their shells. Perhaps this is just a manifestation of atavism, a return to

the times when our forbears had not yet become social animals, and inhabited solitary caves. Or perhaps such people are one of the varieties of the human species, who knows? I am no naturalist, and it is not for me to attempt to solve such problems; all I want to say is that people like Mavra are by no means rare phenomena. Why, only a month or two ago there died in our town a colleague of mine, Belikov, a teacher of Greek. You must have heard of him. He was famous for never stirring out of his house, even in the best weather, without an umbrella, galoshes and a wadded coat. His umbrella he kept in a case, he had a case of grey suede for his watch, and when he took out his pen-knife to sharpen a pencil, he had to draw it out of a case, too; even his face seemed to have a case of its own, since it was always hidden in his turned-up coat-collar. He wore dark glasses, and a thick jersey, and stopped up his ears with cotton wool, and when he engaged a droshky, made the driver put up the hood. In fact, he betrayed a perpetual, irrepressible urge to create a covering for himself, as it were a case, to isolate him and protect him against external influences. Reality irritated and alarmed him and kept him in constant terror, and, perhaps to justify his timidity, the disgust which the present aroused in him, he always praised the past and things which had never had any existence. Even the dead languages he taught were merely galoshes and umbrellas between himself and real life.

“‘How beautiful, how sonorous is the Greek language!’ he would say with a beatific expression; and by way of proof he would half-close his eyes, raise a finger and murmur: ‘Anthropos!’”

“Belikov tried to keep his thoughts in a case, too. Only those circulars and newspaper articles in which something was prohibited were comprehensible to him. When instructions were

circulated forbidding school-boys to be in the streets after 9 p.m., or an article was published in which indulgence in carnal love was condemned, everything was clear and definite for him—these things were prohibited once and for all. In his eyes permission and indulgence always seemed to contain some doubtful element, something left unsaid, vague. If a dramatic society or a reading-room or a cafe were allowed to be opened, he would shake his head and say gently:

“‘It’s a very fine thing no doubt, but ... let’s hope no evil will come of it.’

“The slightest infringement or deviation from the rules plunged him in dejection, even when it could not possibly concern him. If one of his colleagues were late for prayers, or rumours of a trick played by some school-boys reached his ears, if a *dame de classe* were seen late at night in the company of an officer, he would be profoundly agitated, repeating constantly that he was afraid it would lead to no good. At the meetings of the teachers’ council he fairly tormented us with his circumspection and suspicions, his apprehensions and suggestions (typical of a mind encased): the young people in both the girls’ and boys’ schools behave disgracefully, make a terrible noise in the classrooms—supposing the authorities get to hear of it, he hoped no evil would come of it, and wouldn’t it help matters if we expelled Petrov from the second form, and Yegorov from the fourth? And what do you think? With his sighs and moans, his dark glasses on his little, white face—a ferrety sort of face, you know—he managed to depress us all to such an extent that we yielded, gave Petrov and Yegorov low marks for behaviour, had them put in the lock-up, and, finally, expelled. He had an old habit of visiting us in our homes. Going to the rooms of a fellow-teacher, he would sit down and say nothing, with a watchful air. After an

hour or so of this, he would get up and go. He called this 'keeping on friendly terms with one's colleagues', and it was obvious that he found it an uncongenial task and only came to see us because he considered it his duty as a fellow-teacher. We were all afraid of him. Even the headmaster was. Just think! Our teachers are on the whole a decent, intelligent set, brought up on Turgenev and Shchedrin, and yet this mite of a man, with his eternal umbrella and galoshes, managed to keep the whole school under his thumb for fifteen years! And not only the school, but the entire town! Our ladies gave up their Saturday private theatricals for fear of his finding out about them; the clergy were afraid of eating meat or playing cards in his presence. Under the influence of men like Belikov the people in our town have begun to be afraid of everything. They are afraid to speak loudly, write letters, make friends, read books, help the poor, teach the illiterate. . . ."

Ivan Ivanich cleared his throat as if in preparation for some weighty remark, but first he relit his pipe and glanced up at the moon, and only then said, in unhurried tones:

"Quite right. A decent, intelligent set, reading Turgenev, Shchedrin and Buckle and all those, and yet they submitted, they bore with him.... That's just it."

"Belikov and I lived in the same house," went on Burkin, "on the same floor; his door was just opposite mine, we saw quite a lot of one another, and I had a pretty good idea of what his home-life was like. It was the same story: dressing-gown, night-cap, shutters, bolts and bars, a long list of restrictions and prohibitions, and the same adage—let's hope no evil will come of it! Lenten fare did not agree with him, but he could not eat meat or people might say that Belikov did not observe Lent. So he ate pike fried in butter—it was not fasting but neither could



it be called meat. He never kept female servants for fear of people getting 'notions', but employed a male cook, Afanasy, an old man of about sixty, drunken and crazy, who knew how to cook from having served as a batman some time in his life. This Afanasy was usually to be seen standing outside the door with folded arms always muttering the same thing over and over again with a deep sigh:

"Ah, there's a sight of *them* about, nowadays!"

"Belikov's tiny bedroom was like a box, and there was a canopy over the bed. Before going to sleep he always drew the bedclothes over his head; the room was hot and stuffy, the wind rattled against the closed doors and moaned in the chimney; sighs were heard in the kitchen, ominous sighs. . . .

"And he would lie trembling under his blanket. He was afraid that some evil would come, that Afanasy would murder him, that thieves would break in, and his very dreams were haunted by these fears; and in the mornings, when we walked side by side to the school, he was always pale and languid and it was obvious that the crowded school he was approaching was the object of his terror and aversion, and that it was distasteful for him, a recluse by nature, to have to walk by my side.

"They make such a noise in the classrooms,' he would say, as if trying to find an explanation for his heaviness of heart. 'It's quite disgraceful.'

"And what do you think? This teacher of Greek, this hermit-crab, once nearly got married."

Ivan Ivanich turned his head sharply towards the shed.

"You don't mean it!" he said.

"Yes, he nearly got married, strange as it may sound. We were sent a new teacher for history and geography, one Kovalenko, Mikhail Savvich, a Ukrainian. He brought his sister Varya with



him. He was young, tall, dark complexioned, with enormous hands and the kind of face that goes with a deep voice, as a matter of fact he had a deep, booming voice, as if it came from a barrel.

His sister, who was not so young, thirty or thereabouts, was also tall, willowy, black-browed, red-checked, she was a peach of a girl, lively and noisy, always singing Ukrainian songs, always singing. On the slightest provocation she would burst out into a singing ha-ha-ha! The first time we became really acquainted with brother and sister, if I am not mistaken, was at our headmaster's name-day party. Suddenly, among the severe, conventional, dull teachers who make even going to parties a duty, a new Venus rose from the foam, one who walked about with arms akimbo, laughed, sang, danced. She sang with great feeling 'The Winds Are Blowing', following it with another song, then another, and we were all charmed, even Belikov. He sat beside her, and said, with a honeyed smile:

"The Ukrainian tongue in its sweetness and delightful sonority is reminiscent of the ancient Greek."

"The lady was flattered, and began telling him with sincere feeling about her farmstead in the Gadyachi uyezd, where her Mammae lived and where there were such pears, such melons and such pumpkins! Pumpkins are called marrows in the Ukraine, and they make a delicious *horshchik* with blue egg plant and red capsicum, ever so good, you know!

"We sat round her, listening, and the same thought struck us all.

"Why shouldn't these two get married?" said the headmaster's wife to me in a low voice.

"For some reason everyone suddenly realised that our Belikov was a bachelor and we wondered how it was that we had never remarked, had completely overlooked, so important a detail in

his life. What was his attitude to women, how did he solve this vital problem for himself? We had never thought about it before; perhaps none of us could admit the idea that a man who wore galoshes all the year round and slept under a canopy was capable of loving.

“‘He’s well over forty, and she’s thirty...’ the headmaster’s wife went on. ‘I think she would take him.’

“The things one does out of sheer boredom in the provinces, the absurd, useless things! And all because what ought to be done, never is done. Why, why did we feel we had to marry off this Belikov, whom nobody could imagine in the role of a married man? The headmaster’s wife, the inspector’s wife, and all the ladies who had anything to do with the school, brightened up, and actually became handsomer, as if they had at last found an object in life. The headmaster’s wife took a box in the theatre, and whom do we behold in this box but Varya, fanning herself with an enormous fan, radiant, happy, and at her side Belikov, small and huddled up, as if he had been extracted from his room with pincers. I myself gave a party, to which the ladies insisted on my inviting Belikov and Varya. In a word, we started the ball rolling. The idea of marriage, it appeared, was by no means disagreeable to Varya. Her life with her brother was far from happy, they did nothing but wrangle all day long. I’ll give you a typical scene in their lives: Kovalenko stalks along the street, tall and massive, wearing an embroidered shirt, his forelock tumbling over his brow from beneath the peak of his cap; a parcel of books in one hand, a gnarled walking-stick in the other. He is followed by his sister, also carrying books.

“‘But, Misha, you haven’t read it!’ she shouts. ‘You haven’t. I tell you, I am absolutely certain you never read it!’

“‘And I tell you I have!’ Kovalenko shouts back, knocking

with his stick on the pavement.

'For goodness' sake, Misha! What makes you so cross? It's only a matter of principle, after all!'

"And I tell you I *have* read it!' shouts Kovalenko, still louder.

"And at home, whenever anyone came to see them, they would start bickering. She was probably sick of such a life, and longing for a home of her own, and then—her age: there was no time for picking and choosing, the girl would marry anyone, even a teacher of Greek. It's the same with all our girls, by the way—they'd marry anyone, simply for the sake of getting married. However that may be, Varya was beginning to show a marked liking for this Belikov of ours.

"And Belikov? He visited Kovalenko in the same way that he visited the rest of us. He would go to see him, and sit saying nothing. And there he would sit in silence, while Varya sang 'The Winds Are Blowing', gazing at him from her dark eyes, or suddenly breaking out into her 'ha-ha-ha!'

"In affairs of the heart, especially when matrimony is involved, suggestion is all-powerful. Everyone—his colleagues, the ladies—began assuring Belikov that he ought to marry, that there was nothing left for him in life but marriage; we all congratulated him, uttering with solemn countenances various common-places to the effect that marriage was a serious step, and the like; besides, Varenka was by no means plain, she might even be considered handsome, and then she was the daughter of a councillor of state, she had a farmstead of her own and, still more important, was the first woman who had ever treated him with affection. So he lost his head and persuaded himself it was his duty to marry."

"That was the moment to take his umbrella and overshoes

away from him!" put in Ivan Ivanich.

"Ah, but that proved to be impossible! He placed Varenka's photograph on his desk, kept coming to me to talk about Varenka, family life, and the seriousness of marriage. went often to the Kovalenkos, but did not change his way of living in the least. On the contrary, the decision to marry seemed to have a painful effect on him, he grew thinner, paler and seemed to retreat still further into his shell.

"I find Varvara Savvishna an agreeable girl,' he said to me with his faint, crooked smile, 'and every man ought to get married, I know, but ... it's all so sudden, you know.... One must think....'

"What's there to think about?' I answered. 'Get married, that's all.'

"No, no, marriage is a serious step, one ought to weigh one's future duties and responsibilities first ... so's to make sure no evil will come of it.... It worries me so, I can't sleep at night. And to tell you the truth, I am somewhat alarmed—they have such a strange way of thinking, she and her brother, their outlook, you know, is so strange, and then she is so sprightly. Supposing I marry and get mixed up in something....'

"And he put off proposing to her, putting it off from day to day, much to the disappointment of the headmaster's wife and the other ladies; he kept weighing his future duties and responsibilities, walking out with Varenka almost every day, probably thinking the situation demanded it of him, and coming to me to discuss family life in all its aspects. Very likely he would have proposed in the end, contracting another of those stupid, unnecessary marriages, which are made here by the thousand, out of sheer boredom and for want of something better to do, if *ein kolossalische Skandal* had not suddenly broken out. I must tell

you that Varenka's brother, Kovalenko, had contracted a hatred for Belikov from the very first day of their acquaintance, and could never stand him.

"I can't understand you,' he would say, shrugging his shoulders, 'how can you tolerate that sneak of a man, that mug? How can you live here, gentlemen? The atmosphere is stifling, poisonous. Do you call yourselves teachers, pedagogues? You're nothing but a pack of place-hunters. Your school is not a temple of science, but a charitable institution, there's a sickly smell about it, like in a policeman's booth. No, my friends, I shan't be long with you, I'll be going back to my farmstead, to catch crayfish and teach the Ukrainian lads. Yes, I'll go away, and you may stay with your Judas, and be damned to him!'

"Another time he would roar with laughter first in a deep bass, and then in a shrill soprano till the tears came to his eyes.

"Why does he sit there? What does he want—sitting and staring?'

"He gave Belikov a nickname of his own: vampirespider.

"Naturally we avoided mentioning to him that his sister was about to marry this 'spider'. When the headmaster's wife hinted to him that it would be nice to see his sister settled down with such a solid and respected person as Belikov, he knitted his brows and said:

"It's none of my business. She may marry a snake for all I care. I'm not one to meddle in other people's affairs.'

"Now, hear what happened later. Some wag drew a caricature: Belikov in his galoshes, the ends of his trousers turned up, his umbrella open over his head and Varya walking arm-in-arm with him; beneath the drawing there was an inscription: 'The Anthropos in Love'. The expression of his face, you know, was very true to life. The artist must have sat up several nights over



his work, for the teachers of both the schools, the girls' and the boys', and of the seminary, and all the town officials received a copy. Belikov received one, too. The caricature had the most depressing effect on him.

"One day we went out of the house together, it happened to be the first of May and a Sunday and the whole school, pupils and masters, were to meet in front of the school and walk to a wood outside the town—well, we went out, he looking very green about the gills and as black as thunder.

"‘What cruel, malicious people there are in the world,’ he said, and his lips quivered.

"‘I could not help feeling sorry for him. We walked on, when who should we see but Kovalenko riding a bicycle, followed by Varenka, also on a bicycle, panting, red-faced, but very jolly and happy.

"‘We’ll be there before all of you!’ she cried. Isn’t it a glorious day? Wonderful!’

"‘They were soon out of sight. My Belikov, no longer green but deathly pale, was struck dumb. He stopped and stared at me.

"‘What can the meaning of this be?’ he asked. ‘Or do my eyes deceive me? Is it proper for schoolteachers and women to ride bicycles?’

"‘There’s nothing improper about it,’ I said. ‘Why shouldn’t they ride bicycles?’

"‘But it is insufferable!’ he cried. ‘How can you talk like that?’

"‘The shock he had received was too great; refusing to go any further, he turned homewards.

"‘All the next day he kept nervously rubbing his hands together and starting, and you could see by his face that he was not well. He left school before lessons were over—a thing he had



never done before. And he did not eat any dinner. Towards evening he dressed warmly, though it was a real summer day, and shuffled off to the Kovalenkos. Varenka was not in, but her brother was.

“‘Take a seat, please,’ said Kovalenko coldly, knitting his brows; he had just got up from his afternoon nap, his face was still heavy with sleep, and he felt awful.

“After sitting in silence for about ten minutes, Belikov began:

“‘I have come to relieve my mind. I am very, very unhappy. A certain unknown lampoonist has made a drawing in which he ridicules me and a certain other person near to us both. I consider it my duty to assure you that it is not my fault. I have done nothing to give grounds for such ridicule, on the contrary, I have behaved like a thorough gentleman all the time.’

“Kovalenko sat silent and lowering. After a short pause Belikov went on in his low plaintive voice:

“‘And there’s something else I have to say to you. I am a veteran and you are only beginning your career, and it is my duty as an older colleague of yours to warn you. You ride a bicycle and this is a highly reprehensible amusement for one who aspires to educate the young.’

“‘Why?’ asked Kovalenko in his deep bass voice.

“‘Does it require explanation, Mikhail Savvich, I should have thought it was self-evident. If the master is to go about riding a bicycle, there is nothing left for the pupils but to walk on their heads. And since no circular permitting this has been issued, it is wrong. I was astounded yesterday! I nearly fainted when I saw your sister. A young lady on a bicycle—preposterous!’

“‘What exactly do you want from me?’

“‘I only want to warn you, Mikhail Savvich. You are young,

you have your life before you, you must be very, very careful, and you are so reckless, so very reckless! You go about in embroidered shirts, are constantly seen carrying all sorts of books about the streets, and now this bicycle. The fact that you and your sister have been seen riding bicycles will be made known to the headmaster, it will reach the patron's ears.... And that's no good.'

"'It is no man's business whether my sister and I ride bicycles or not!' said Kovalenko, flushing up. 'And if people stick their noses into my domestic and family affairs they can go to hell.'

"Belikov turned pale and rose to his feet.

"'Since you assume such a tone with me, I cannot go on,' he said. 'And I would beg you to be careful what you say about our superiors in my presence. The authorities must be treated with deference.'

"'And did I say anything wrong about the authorities?' asked Kovalenko, looking at him with hatred. 'Leave me alone, Sir. I am an honest man, and have nothing to say to a person like you. I abhor snakes.'

"Belikov fidgeted nervously and began hastily putting on his coat, an expression of horror on his face. Never in his life had anyone spoken so rudely to him.

"'You may say what you like,' he said as he passed on to the landing. 'But I must warn you: somebody may have overheard us, and to prevent our conversation from being misrepresented, and the possible consequence of this, I shall have to report the purport of our conversation to the headmaster ... its main points. It is my duty.'

"'What? Report? Go on, then!'

"Kovalenko grasped him by the collar and gave him a push,

and Belikov rolled down the stairs, his galoshes knocking against the steps. The staircase was long and steep, but he arrived at the bottom unhurt, rose to his feet and felt the bridge of his nose to see if his glasses were unbroken. But while he was rolling down the steps, Varenka, accompanied by two other ladies, entered the porch; they all three stood at the bottom of the stairs, looking at him—and for Belikov that was the worst of all his sufferings. He would a great deal sooner have broken his neck, and both legs, than appear in a ridiculous light. Now the whole town would know of it, the headmaster would be told, and probably the patron, too. And who knows what that would lead to! Someone might draw another caricature and it would end in his having to resign...

“When he got up, Varya recognised him, and looking at his ridiculous face, his rumpled coat, his overshoes, without the faintest idea what had happened, but supposing that he must have slipped, she could not help bursting out with her loud ‘ha-ha-ha!’

“This buoyant resonant ‘ha-ha’ was the end: the end of Belikov’s courting and of his earthly existence. He never again saw Varenka. The first thing he did when he got home was to remove her photograph from the top of his desk, then he lay down on his bed, never to leave it.

“Three days later Afanasy came to ask me whether he should send for the doctor, for his master was behaving very strangely. I went to see Belikov. He was lying under his canopy, covered by a blanket, mute; he answered my questions with a monosyllabic ‘yes’ or ‘no’, and not a word more. There he lay, while Afanasy, morose and frowning, stumped round the bed, heaving deep sighs and reeking of spirits like a tavern.

“A month went by and Belikov died. Everybody, that is to

say, the two schools and the seminary, went to his funeral. Now, as he lay in his coffin, the expression on his face was gentle, pleasing, even cheerful, as if he were glad at last to be put into a case which he would never have to leave. Yes, he had achieved his ideal! As if in his honour the day was cloudy and wet, and we all wore galoshes and carried umbrellas. Varya was at the funeral, too, and shed a tear when the coffin was lowered into the grave. I have noticed with Ukrainian women that they must either laugh or weep, they do not admit of any intermediate moods.

"I must confess that it is a great pleasure to bury individuals like Belikov. But we returned from the cemetery with long, 'lenten' faces: none of us wished to show our relief, a relief like that we felt long ago, in childhood, when the grown-ups went away and we could run about the garden for an hour or two enjoying perfect freedom. Ah, freedom! A hint of it, the faintest hope of attaining it, gives wings to our souls, doesn't it?"

"We returned from the cemetery in good spirits. But hardly a week passed before everyday life, bleak, fatiguing, meaningless life, neither forbidden in one circular nor sanctioned in another, resumed its usual course: and things were no better than they had been before. After all, when you come to think of it, though we have buried Belikov, there are still plenty of men who live in a shell, and there are plenty as yet unborn."

"Yes, indeed," said Ivan Ivanich as he lit his pipe.

"And plenty as yet unborn!" repeated Burkin.

The high-school teacher came out of the shed. He was short, corpulent, quite bald, with a long black beard reaching nearly to his belt; two dogs came out with him.

"What a moon!" he said, looking up.

It was past midnight. The whole of the village was visible

on the right, the long street extending for five versts or so. Everything was plunged in profound, calm sleep; not a sound, not a stir, it seemed incredible that nature could be so calm. When we gaze upon a wide village street on a moonlit night, with its dwellings and hayricks and sleeping willows, a great peace descends on our souls; in its serenity, sheltered by the shadows of the night from all toil, cares and grief, the village seems gentle, melancholy and beautiful, the very stars seem to look down upon it kindly, and there seems to be no more evil in the world, and all is well. To the left, where the village ended, stretched the fields; one could look far into them, to the very horizon, and all was silent and motionless there, too, and the vast plain was flooded with moonlight.

"Yes, indeed," repeated Ivan Ivanich. "And is not our living in towns, in our stuffy, cramped rooms, writing our useless papers, playing vint, isn't that living in an oyster-shell, too? And the fact that we spend all our life among drones, litigious boors, silly, idle women, talk nonsense and listen to nonsense, is not that our oyster-shell, too? I could tell you a highly instructive yarn, if you'd care to listen. . . ."

"I think it's time we went to sleep," said Burkin. "Keep it for tomorrow."

They went to the shed and lay down. They snuggled into the hay and began to doze when a light footstep was heard outside. Somebody was walking about not far from the shed; a few steps, then a stop, and then again the light steps. The dogs growled.

"It's Mavra having a walk," said Burkin.

The steps were heard no more.

"To have to look on and listen to people lying," said Ivan Ivanich as he turned on his side, "and then to be called a fool for tolerating all those lies; to swallow insults, humiliations, not dare



to speak up and declare yourself on the side of honest, free men, to lie yourself, to smile, and all for the sake of a crust of bread and a snug corner to live in, for the sake of some miserable rank—no, no, life is intolerable!”

“This is quite another theme, Ivan Ivanich,” said the school-master. “Let’s go to sleep.”

In ten minutes Burkin was asleep. But Ivan Ivanich kept sighing and tossing on the hay; then he got up, went out again, and sitting down by the door, lit his pipe.

1898

## Gooseberries

The sky had been covered with rain-clouds ever since the early morning; it was a still day, cool and dull, one of those misty days when the clouds have long been lowering overhead and you keep thinking it is just going to rain, and the rain holds off. Ivan Ivanich, the veterinary surgeon, and Burkin, the high-school teacher, had walked till they were tired, and the way over the fields seemed endless to them. Far ahead they could just make out the windmill of the village of Mironositskoye, and what looked like a range of low hills at the right extending well beyond the village, and they both knew that this range was really the bank of the river, and that further on were meadows, green willow-trees, country-estates; if they were on the top of these hills, they knew they would see the same boundless fields and telegraph-posts, and the train, like a crawling caterpillar in the distance, while in fine weather even the town would be visible. On this still day, when the whole of nature seemed kindly and pensive, Ivan Ivanich and Burkin felt a surge of love for this plain, and thought how vast and beautiful their country was.

"The last time we stayed in Elder Prokofy's hut," said Burkin, "you said you had a story to tell me."

"Yes. I wanted to tell you the story of my brother."

Ivan Ivanich took a deep breath and lighted his pipe as a preliminary to his narrative, but just then the rain came. Five minutes later it was coming down in torrents and nobody could say when it would stop. Ivan Ivanich and Burkin stood still, lost in thought. The dogs, already soaked, stood with drooping tails,

gazing at them wistfully.

"We must try and find shelter," said Burkin. "Let's go to Alekhin's. It's quite near."

"Come on, then."

They turned aside and walked straight across the newly reaped field, veering to the right till they came to a road. Very soon poplars, an orchard, and the red roofs of barns came into sight. The surface of the river gleamed, and they had a view of an extensive reach of water, a windmill and a whitewashed bathing-shed. This was Sofyino, where Alekhin lived.

The mill was working, and the noise made by its sails drowned the sound of the rain; the whole dam trembled. Horses, soaking wet, were standing near some carts, their heads drooping, and people were moving about with sacks over their heads and shoulders. It was wet, muddy, bleak, and the water looked cold and sinister. Ivan Ivanich and Burkin were already experiencing the misery of dampness, dirt, physical discomfort, their boots were caked with mud, and when, having passed the mill-dam, they took the upward path to the landowner's barns, they fell silent, as if vexed with one another.

The sound of winnowing came from one of the barns; the door was open, and clouds of dust issued from it. Standing in the doorway was Alekhin himself, a stout man of some forty years, with longish hair, looking more like a professor or an artist than a landed proprietor. He was wearing a white shirt greatly in need of washing, belted with a piece of string, and long drawers with no trousers over them. His boots, too, were caked with mud and straw. His eyes and nose were ringed with dust. He recognised Ivan Ivanich and Burkin, and seemed glad to see them.

"Go up to the house, gentlemen," he said, smiling. "I'll be with you in a minute."

It was a large two-storey house. Alekhin occupied the ground floor, two rooms with vaulted ceilings and tiny windows, where the stewards had lived formerly. They were poorly furnished, and smelled of rye-bread, cheap vodka, and harness. He hardly ever went into the upstairs rooms, excepting when he had guests. Ivan Ivanich and Burkin were met by a maid-servant, a young woman of such beauty that they stood still involuntarily and exchanged glances.

"You have no idea how glad I am to see you here, dear friends," said Alekhin, overtaking them in the hall. "It's quite a surprise! Pelageya," he said, turning to the maid, "find the gentlemen a change of clothes. And I might as well change, myself. But I must have a wash first, for I don't believe I've had a bath since the spring. Wouldn't you like to go and have a bathe while they get things ready here?"

The beauteous Pelageya, looking very soft and delicate, brought them towels and soap, and Alekhin and his guests set off for the bathing-house.

"Yes, it's a long time since I had a wash," he said, taking off his clothes. "As you see I have a nice bathing-place, my father had it built, but somehow I never seem to get time to wash."

He sat on the step, soaping his long locks and his neck, and all round him the water was brown.

"Yes, you certainly..." remarked Ivan Ivanich, with a significant glance at his host's head.

"It's a long time since I had a wash..." repeated Alekhin, somewhat abashed, and he soaped himself again, and now the water was dark blue, like ink.

Ivan Ivanich emerged from the shed, splashed noisily into the water, and began swimming beneath the rain spreading his

arms wide, making waves all round him and the white water-lilies rocked on the waves he made. He swam into the very middle of the river and then dived, a moment later came up at another place and swam further, diving constantly, and trying to touch the bottom. "Ah, my God" he kept exclaiming in his enjoyment. "Ah, my God..." He swam up to the mill, had a little talk with some peasants there and turned back, but when he got to the middle of the river, he floated, holding his face up to the rain. Burkin and Alekhin were dressed and ready to go, but he went on swimming and diving.

"God! God!" he kept exclaiming. "Dear God!"

"Come out!" Burkin shouted to him.

They went back to the house. And only after the lamp was lit in the great drawing-room on the upper floor, and Burkin and Ivan Ivanich, in silk dressing-gowns and warm slippers, were seated in armchairs, while Alekhin, washed and combed, paced the room in his new frockcoat, enjoying the warmth, the cleanliness, his dry clothes and comfortable slippers, while the fair Pelageya, smiling benevolently, stepped noiselessly over the carpet with her tray of tea preserves, did Ivan Ivanich embark upon his yarn, and the ancient dames, young ladies and military gentlemen looking down at them severely from their gilded frames, as if they, too, were listening.

"There were two of us brothers," he began. "Ivan Ivanich (me), and my brother Nikolai Ivanich, two years younger than myself. I went in for learning and became a veterinary surgeon, but Nikolai started working in a government office when he was only nineteen. Our father, Chimsha-Himalaisky, was educated in a school for the sons of private soldiers, but was later promoted to officer's rank, and was made a hereditary nobleman and given a small estate. After his death the estate had to be sold for debts,



but at least our childhood was passed in the freedom of the countryside, where we roamed the fields and the woods like peasant children, taking the horses to graze, peeling bark from the trunks of lime-trees, fishing, and all that sort of thing. And anyone who has once in his life fished for perch, or watched the thrushes fly south in the autumn, rising high over the village on clear, cool days, is spoilt for town life, and will long for the countryside for the rest of his days. My brother pined in his government office. The years passed and he sat in the same place every day, writing out the same documents and thinking all the time of the same thing—how to get back to the country. And these longings of his gradually turned into a definite desire, into a dream of purchasing a little estate somewhere on the bank of a river or the shore of a lake.

“He was a meek, good-natured chap, I was fond of him, but could feel no sympathy with the desire to lock oneself up for life in an estate of one’s own. They say man only needs six feet of earth. But it is a corpse, and not man, which needs these six feet. And now people are actually saying that it is a good sign for our intellectuals to yearn for the land and try to obtain country-dwellings. And yet these estates are nothing but those same six feet of earth. To escape from the town, from the struggle, from the noise of life, to escape and hide one’s head on a country-estate, is not life, but egoism, idleness, it is a sort of renunciation, but renunciation without faith. It is not six feet of earth, not a country-estate, that man needs, but the whole globe, the whole of nature, room to display his qualities and the individual characteristics of his soul.

“My brother Nikolai sat at his office-desk, dreaming of eating soup made from his own cabbages, which would spread a delicious smell all over his own yard, of eating out of doors, on the

green grass, of sleeping in the sun, sitting for hours on a bench outside his gate, and gazing at the fields and woods. Books on agriculture and all those hints printed on calendars were his delight, his favourite spiritual nourishment. He was fond of reading newspapers, too, but all he read in them was advertisements of the sale of so many acres of arable and meadowland, with residence attached, a river, an orchard, a mill, and ponds fed by springs. His head was full of visions of garden paths, flowers, fruit, nesting-boxes, carp-ponds, and all that sort of thing. These visions differed according to the advertisements he came across, but for some reason gooseberry bushes invariably figured in them. He could not picture to himself a single estate or picturesque nook that did not have gooseberry bushes in it.

“‘Country life has its conveniences,’ he would say. ‘You sit on the verandah, drinking tea, with your own ducks floating on the pond, and everything smells so nice, and... and the gooseberries ripen on the bushes.’

“He drew up plans for his estate, and every plan showed the same features: a) the main residence, b) the servants’ wing, c) the kitchen-garden, d) gooseberry bushes. He lived thriftily, never ate or drank his fill, dressed anyhow, like a beggar, and saved up all his money in the bank. He became terribly stingy. I could hardly bear to look at him, and whenever I gave him a little money, or sent him a present on some holiday, he put that away, too. Once a man gets an idea into his head, there’s no doing anything with him.

“The years passed, he was sent to another gubernia, he was over forty, and was still reading advertisements in the papers, and saving up. At last I heard he had married. All for the same purpose, to buy himself an estate with gooseberry bushes on it, he married an ugly elderly widow, for whom he had not the

slightest affection, just because she had some money. After his marriage he went on living as thriftily as ever, half-starving his wife, and putting her money in his own bank account. Her first husband had been a post-master, and she was used to pies and cordials, but with her second husband she did not even get enough black bread to eat. She began to languish on this diet and three years later yielded up her soul to God. Of course my brother did not for a moment consider himself guilty of her death. Money, like vodka, makes a man eccentric. There was a merchant in our town who asked for a plate of honey on his deathbed and ate up all his bank-notes and lottery tickets with the honey, so that no one else should get them. And one day when I was examining a consignment of cattle at a railway station, a drover fell under the engine and his leg was severed from his body. We carried him all bloody into the waiting-room, a terrible sight, and he did nothing but beg us to look for his leg, worrying all the time—there were twenty rubles in the boot, and he was afraid they would be lost.”

“You’re losing the thread,” put in Burkin.

Ivan Ivanich paused for a moment, and went on: “After his wife’s death my brother began to look about for an estate. You can search for five years, of course, and in the end make a mistake and buy something quite different from what you dream of. My brother Nikolai bought three hundred acres, complete with gentleman’s house, servants’ quarters, and a park, on a mortgage to be paid through an agent, but there were neither an orchard, gooseberry bushes, nor a pond with ducks on it. There was a river, but it was as dark as coffee, owing to the fact that there was a brick-works on one side of the estate, and bone-kilns on the other. Nothing daunted, however, my brother Nikolai Ivanich ordered two dozen gooseberry bushes and settled down

as a landed proprietor.

"Last year I paid him a visit. I thought I would go and see how he was getting on there. In his letters my brother gave his address as Chumbaroklova Pustosh or Himalaiskoye. I arrived at Himalaiskoye in the afternoon. It was very hot. Everywhere were ditches, fences, hedges, rows of fir-trees, and it was hard to drive into the yard and find a place to leave one's carriage. As I went a fat ginger-coloured dog, remarkably like a pig, came out to meet me. It looked as if it would have barked if it were not so lazy. The cook, who was also fat and like a pig, came out of the kitchen, barefoot, and said her master was having his after-dinner rest. I made my way to my brother's room, and found him sitting up in bed, his knees covered by a blanket. He had aged, and grown stout and flabby. His cheeks, nose and lips protruded—I almost expected him to grunt into the blanket.

"We embraced and wept—tears of joy, mingled with melancholy—because we had once been young and were now both grey-haired and approaching the grave. He put on his clothes and went out to show me over his estate.

"Well, how are you getting on here?' I asked.

"All right, thanks be, I'm enjoying myself.'

"He was no longer the poor, timid clerk, but a true proprietor, a gentleman. He had settled down, and was entering with zest into country life. He ate a lot, washed in the bath-house, and put on flesh. He had already got into litigation with the village commune, the brick-works and the bone-kilns, and took offence if the peasants failed to call him 'Your Honour'. He went in for religion in a solid, gentlemanly way, and there was nothing casual about his pretentious good works. And what were these good works? He treated all the diseases of the peasants with bicarbonate of soda and castor-oil, and had a special thanksgiv-

ing service held on his name-day, after which he provided half a pail of vodka, supposing that this was the right thing to do. Oh, those terrible half pails! Today the fat landlord hauls the peasants before the Zemstvo representative for letting their sheep graze on his land, tomorrow, on the day of rejoicing, he treats them to half a pail of vodka, and they drink and sing and shout hurrah, prostrating themselves before him when they are drunk. Any improvement in his conditions, anything like satiety or idleness, develops the most insolent complacency in a Russian. Nikolai Ivanich, who had been afraid of having an opinion of his own when he was in the government service, was now continually coming out with axioms, in the most ministerial manner: 'Education is essential, but the people are not ready for it yet', 'corporal punishment is an evil, but in certain cases it is beneficial and indispensable.'

"I know the people and I know how to treat them," he said. 'The people love me. I only have to lift my little finger, and the people will do whatever I want.'

"And all this, mark you, with a wise, indulgent smile. Over and over again he repeated: 'We the gentry', or 'speaking as a gentleman', and seemed to have quite forgotten that our grandfather was a peasant, and our father a common soldier. Our very surname—Chimsha-Himalaisky—in reality so absurd, now seemed to him a resounding, distinguished, and euphonious name.

"But it is of myself, and not of him, that I wish to speak. I should like to describe to you the change which came over me in those few hours I spent on my brother's estate. As we were drinking tea in the evening, the cook brought us a full plate of gooseberries. These were not gooseberries bought for money, they came from his own garden, and were the first fruits of the bushes he had planted. Nikolai Ivanich broke into a laugh and



gazed at the gooseberries in tearful silence for at least five minutes. Speechless with emotion, he popped a single gooseberry into his mouth, darted at me the triumphant glance of a child who has at last gained possession of a longed-for toy, and said:

“‘Delicious!’

“And he ate them greedily, repeating over and over again:

“‘Simply delicious! You try them.’

“They were hard and sour, but, as Pushkin says: ‘The lie which elates us is dearer than a thousand sober truths.’ I saw before me a really happy man, one whose dearest wish had come true, who had achieved his aim in life, got what he wanted, and was content with his lot and with himself. There had always been a tinge of melancholy in my conception of human happiness, and now, confronted by a happy man, I was overcome by a feeling of sadness bordering on desperation. This feeling grew strongest of all in the night. A bed was made up for me in the room next to my brother’s bedroom, and I could hear him moving about restlessly, every now and then getting up to take a gooseberry from the plate. How many happy, satisfied people there are, after all, I said to myself. What an overwhelming force! Just consider this life—the insolence and idleness of the strong, the ignorance and bestiality of the weak, all around intolerable poverty, cramped dwellings, degeneracy, drunkenness, hypocrisy, lying.... And yet peace and order apparently prevail in all those homes and in the streets. Of the fifty thousand inhabitants of a town, not one will be found to cry out, to proclaim his indignation aloud. We see those who go to the market to buy food, who eat in the day-time and sleep at night, who prattle away, marry, grow old, carry their dead to the cemeteries. But we neither hear nor see those who suffer, and the terrible things in life are played out behind the scenes. All is calm and quiet, only

statistics, which are dumb, protest: so many have gone mad, so many barrels of drink have been consumed, so many children died of malnutrition.... And apparently this is as it should be. Apparently those who are happy can only enjoy themselves because the unhappy bear their burdens in silence, and but for this silence happiness would be impossible. It is a kind of universal hypnosis. There ought to be a man with a hammer behind the door of every happy man, to remind him by his constant knocks that there are unhappy people, and that happy as he himself may be, life will sooner or later show him its claws, catastrophe will overtake him—sickness, poverty, loss—and nobody will see it, just as he now neither sees nor hears the misfortunes of others. But there is no man with a hammer, the happy man goes on living and the petty vicissitudes of life touch him lightly, like the wind in an aspen-tree, and all is well.

“That night I understood that I, too, was happy and content,” continued Ivan Ivanich, getting up. “I, too, while out hunting, or at the dinner table, have held forth on the right way to live, to worship, to manage the people. I, too, have declared that without knowledge there can be no light, that education is essential, but that bare literacy is sufficient for the common people. Freedom is a blessing, I have said, one can’t get on without it, any more than without air, but we must wait. Yes, that is what I said, and now I ask: In the name of what must we wait?” Here Ivan Ivanich looked angrily at Burkin. “In the name of what must we wait, I ask you? What is there to be considered? Don’t be in such a hurry, they tell me, every idea materialises gradually, in its own time. But who are they who say this? What is the proof that it is just? You refer to the natural order of things, to the logic of facts, but according to what order, what logic do I, a living, thinking individual, stand on the edge of a ditch and wait for it

to be gradually filled up, or choked with silt, when I might leap across it or build a bridge over it? And again, in the name of what must we wait? Wait, when we have not the strength to live, though live we must and to live we desire!

"I left my brother early the next morning, and ever since I have found town life intolerable. The peace and order weigh on my spirits, and I am afraid to look into windows, because there is now no sadder spectacle for me than a happy family seated around the tea-table. I am old and unfit for the struggle, I am even incapable of feeling hatred. I can only suffer inwardly, and give way to irritation and annoyance, at night my head burns from the rush of thoughts, and I am unable to sleep.... Oh, if only I were young!"

Ivan Ivanich began pacing backwards and forwards, repeating:

"If only I were young still!"

Suddenly he went up to Alekhin and began pressing first one of his hands, and then the other.

"Pavel Konstantinich," he said in imploring accents. "Don't *you* fall into apathy, don't *you* let your conscience be lulled to sleep! While you are still young, strong, active, do not be weary of well-doing. There is no such thing as happiness, nor ought there to be, but if there is any sense or purpose in life, this sense and purpose are to be found not in our own happiness, but in something greater and more rational. Do good!"

Ivan Ivanich said all this with a piteous, imploring smile, as if he were asking for something for himself.

Then they all three sat in their armchairs a long way apart from one another, and said nothing. Ivan Ivanich's story satisfied neither Burkin nor Alekhin. It was not interesting to listen to the story of a poor clerk who ate gooseberries, when from the walls

generals and fine ladies, who seemed to come to life in the dark, were looking down from their gilded frames. It would have been much more interesting to hear about elegant people, lovely women. And the fact that they were sitting in a drawing-room in which everything—the swathed chandeliers, the armchairs, the carpet on the floor—proved that the people now looking out of the frames had once moved about here, sat in the chairs, drunk tea, where the fair Pelageya was now going noiselessly to and fro, was better than any story.

Alekhin was desperately sleepy. He had got up early, at three o'clock in the morning, to go about his work on the estate, and could now hardly keep his eyes open. But he would not go to bed, for fear one of his guests would relate something interesting after he was gone. He could not be sure whether what Ivan Ivanich had just told them was wise or just, but his visitors talked of other things besides grain, hay, or tar, of things which had no direct bearing on his daily life, and he liked this, and wanted them to go on. . . .

“Well, time to go to bed,” said Burkin, getting up. “Allow me to wish you a good night.”

Alekhin said good night and went downstairs to his own room, the visitors remaining on the upper floor. They were allotted a big room for the night, in which were two ancient bedsteads of carved wood, and an ivory crucifix in one corner. There was a pleasant smell of freshly laundered sheets from the wide, cool beds which the fair Pelageya had made up for them.

Ivan Ivanich undressed in silence and lay down.

“Lord have mercy on us, sinners,” he said, and covered his head with the sheet.

There was a strong smell of stale tobacco from his pipe, which he put on the table, and Burkin lay awake a long time,

Gooseberries

wondering where the stifling smell came from.

The rain tapped on the window-panes all night.

1898





Leo Tolstoy



## Ivan The Fool

### I

**I**n a certain kingdom there lived a rich peasant, who had three sons—Simeon (a soldier), Tarras-Briukhan (fat man), and Ivan (a fool)—and one daughter, Milania, born dumb. Simeon went to war, to serve the Czar; Tarras went to a city and became a merchant; and Ivan, with his sister, remained at home to work on the farm.

For his valiant service in the army, Simeon received an estate with high rank, and married a noble's daughter. Besides his large pay, he was in receipt of a handsome income from his estate; yet he was unable to make ends meet. What the husband saved, the wife wasted in extravagance. One day Simeon went to the estate to collect his income, when the steward informed him that there was no income, saying:

"We have neither horses, cows, fishing-nets, nor implements; it is necessary first to buy everything, and then to look for income."

Simeon thereupon went to his father and said:

"You are rich, batiushka [little father], but you have given nothing to me. Give me one-third of what you possess as my share, and I will transfer it to my estate."

The old man replied: "You did not help to bring prosperity to our household. For what reason, then, should you now demand the third part of everything? It would be unjust to Ivan and his

sister."

"Yes," said Simeon; "but he is a fool, and she was born dumb. What need have they of anything?"

"See what Ivan will say."

Ivan's reply was: "Well, let him take his share."

Simeon took the portion allotted to him, and went again to serve in the army.

Tarras also met with success. He became rich and married a merchant's daughter, but even this failed to satisfy his desires, and he also went to his father and said, "Give me my share."

The old man, however, refused to comply with his request, saying: "You had no hand in the accumulation of our property, and what our household contains is the result of Ivan's hard work. It would be unjust," he repeated, "to Ivan and his sister."

Tarras replied: "But he does not need it. He is a fool, and cannot marry, for no one will have him; and sister does not require anything, for she was born dumb." Turning then to Ivan he continued: "Give me half the grain you have, and I will not touch the implements or fishing-nets; and from the cattle I will take only the dark mare, as she is not fit to plow."

Ivan laughed and said: "Well, I will go and arrange matters so that Tarras may have his share," whereupon Tarras took the brown mare with the grain to town, leaving Ivan with one old horse to work on as before and support his father, mother, and sister.

## II

It was disappointing to the Stary Tchert (Old Devil) that the brothers did not quarrel over the division of the property, and that they separated peacefully; and he cried out, calling his three

small devils (Tchertionki).

"See here," said he, "there are living three brothers—Simeon the soldier, Tarras-Briukhan, and Ivan the Fool. It is necessary that they should quarrel. Now they live peacefully, and enjoy each other's hospitality. The Fool spoiled all my plans. Now you three go and work with them in such a manner that they will be ready to tear each other's eyes out. Can you do this?"

"We can," they replied.

"How will you accomplish it?"

"In this way: We will first ruin them to such an extent that they will have nothing to eat, and we will then gather them together in one place where we are sure that they will fight."

"Very well; I see you understand your business. Go, and do not return to me until you have created a feud between the three brothers—or I will skin you alive."

The three small devils went to a swamp to consult as to the best means of accomplishing their mission. They disputed for a long time—each one wanting the easiest part of the work—and not being able to agree, concluded to draw lots; by which it was decided that the one who was first finished had to come and help the others. This agreement being entered into, they appointed a time when they were again to meet in the swamp—to find out who was through and who needed assistance.

The time having arrived, the young devils met in the swamp as agreed, when each related his experience. The first, who went to Simeon, said: "I have succeeded in my undertaking, and to-morrow Simeon returns to his father."

His comrades, eager for particulars, inquired how he had done it.

"Well," he began, "the first thing I did was to blow some courage into his veins, and, on the strength of it, Simeon went



to the Czar and offered to conquer the whole world for him. The Emperor made him commander-in-chief of the forces, and sent him with an army to fight the Viceroy of India. Having started on their mission of conquest, they were unaware that I, following in their wake, had wet all their powder. I also went to the Indian ruler and showed him how I could create numberless soldiers from straw.

Simeon's army, seeing that they were surrounded by such a vast number of Indian warriors of my creation, became frightened, and Simeon commanded to fire from cannons and rifles, which of course they were unable to do. The soldiers, discouraged, retreated in great disorder. Thus Simeon brought upon himself the terrible disgrace of defeat. His estate was confiscated, and tomorrow he is to be executed. All that remains for me to do, therefore," concluded the young devil, "is to release him tomorrow morning. Now, then, who wants my assistance?"

The second small devil (from Tarras) then related his story.

"I do not need any help," he began. "My business is also all right. My work with Tarras will be finished in one week. In the first place I made him grow thin. He became so covetous that he wanted to possess everything he saw, and he spent all the money he had in the purchase of immense quantities of goods. When his capital was gone he still continued to buy with borrowed money, and has become involved in such difficulties that he cannot free himself. At the end of one week the date for the payment of his notes will have expired, and, his goods being seized upon, he will become a bankrupt; and he also will return to his father."

At the conclusion of this narrative they inquired of the third devil how things had fared between him and Ivan.

"Well," said he, "my report is not so encouraging. The first thing I did was to spit into his jug of quass [a sour drink made

from rye], which made him sick at his stomach. He afterward went to plow his summer-fallow, but I made the soil so hard that the plow could scarcely penetrate it. I thought the Fool would not succeed, but he started to work nevertheless. Moaning with pain, he still continued to labor. I broke one plow, but he replaced it with another, fixing it securely, and resumed work. Going beneath the surface of the ground I took hold of the plowshares, but did not succeed in stopping Ivan. He pressed so hard, and the colter was so sharp, that my hands were cut; and despite my utmost efforts, he went over all but a small portion of the field."

He concluded with: "Come, brothers, and help me, for if we do not conquer him our whole enterprise will be a failure. If the Fool is permitted successfully to conduct his farming, they will have no need, for he will support his brothers."

### III

Ivan having succeeded in plowing all but a small portion of his land, returned the next day to finish it. The pain in his stomach continued, but he felt that he must go on with his work. He tried to start his plow, but it would not move; it seemed to have struck a hard root. It was the small devil in the ground who had wound his feet around the plowshares and held them.

"This is strange," thought Ivan. "There were never any roots here before, and this is surely one."

Ivan put his hand in the ground, and, feeling something soft, grasped and pulled it out. It was like a root in appearance, but seemed to possess life. Holding it up he saw that it was a little devil. Disgusted, he exclaimed, "See the nasty thing," and he

proceeded to strike it a blow, intending to kill it, when the young devil cried out:

"Do not kill me, and I will grant your every wish."

"What can you do for me?"

"Tell me what it is you most wish for," the little devil replied.

Ivan, peasant-fashion, scratched the back of his head as he thought, and finally he said:

"I am dreadfully sick at my stomach. Can you cure me?"

"I can," the little devil said.

"Then do so."

The little devil bent toward the earth and began searching for roots, and when he found them he gave them to Ivan, saying: "If you will swallow some of these you will be immediately cured of whatsoever disease you are afflicted with."

Ivan did as directed, and obtained instant relief.

"I beg of you to let me go now," the little devil pleaded; "I will pass into the earth, never to return."

"Very well; you may go, and God bless you;" and as Ivan pronounced the name of God, the small devil disappeared into the earth like a flash, and only a slight opening in the ground remained.

Ivan placed in his hat what roots he had left, and proceeded to plow. Soon finishing his work, he turned his plow over and returned home.

When he reached the house he found his brother Simeon and his wife seated at the supper-table. His estate had been confiscated, and he himself had barely escaped execution by making his way out of prison, and having nothing to live upon had come back to his father for support.

Turning to Ivan he said: "I came to ask you to care for us until I can find something to do."

"Very well," Ivan replied; "you may remain with us."

Just as Ivan was about to sit down to the table Simeon's wife made a wry face, indicating that she did not like the smell of Ivan's sheep-skin coat; and turning to her husband she said, "I shall not sit at the table with a moujik [peasant] who smells like that."

Simeon the soldier turned to his brother and said: "My lady objects to the smell of your clothes. You may eat in the porch."

Ivan said: "Very well, it is all the same to me. I will soon have to go and feed my horse any way."

Ivan took some bread in one hand, and his kaftan (coat) in the other, and left the room.

#### IV

The small devil finished with Simeon that night, and according to agreement went to the assistance of his comrade who had charge of Ivan, that he might help to conquer the Fool. He went to the field and searched everywhere, but could find nothing but the hole through which the small devil had disappeared.

"Well, this is strange," he said; "something must have happened to my companion, and I will have to take his place and continue the work he began. The Fool is through with his plowing, so I must look about me for some other means of compassing his destruction. I must overflow his meadow and prevent him from cutting the grass."

The little devil accordingly overflowed the meadow with muddy water, and, when Ivan went at dawn next morning with his scythe set and sharpened and tried to mow the grass, he found that it resisted all his efforts and would not yield to the

implement as usual.

Many times Ivan tried to cut the grass, but always without success. At last, becoming weary of the effort, he decided to return home and have his scythe again sharpened, and also to procure a quantity of bread, saying: "I will come back here and will not leave until I have mown all the meadow, even if it should take a whole week."

Hearing this, the little devil became thoughtful, saying: "That Ivan is a koolak [hard case], and I must think of some other way of conquering him."

Ivan soon returned with his sharpened scythe and started to mow.

The small devil hid himself in the grass, and as the point of the scythe came down he buried it in the earth and made it almost impossible for Ivan to move the implement. He, however, succeeded in mowing all but one small spot in the swamp, where again the small devil hid himself, saying: "Even if he should cut my hands I will prevent him from accomplishing his work."

When Ivan came to the swamp he found that the grass was not very thick. Still, the scythe would not work, which made him so angry that he worked with all his might, and one blow more powerful than the others cut off a portion of the small devil's tail, who had hidden himself there.

Despite the little devil's efforts he succeeded in finishing his work, then he returned home and ordered his sister to gather up the grass while he went to another field to cut rye. But the devil preceded him there, and fixed the rye in such a manner that it was almost impossible for Ivan to cut it; however, after continuous hard labor he succeeded, and when he was through with the rye he said to himself: "Now I will start to mow oats."

On hearing this, the little devil thought to himself: "I could



not prevent him from mowing the rye, but I will surely stop him from mowing the oats when the morning comes."

Early next day, when the devil came to the field, he found that the oats had been already mowed. Ivan did it during the night, so as to avoid the loss that might have resulted from the grain being too ripe and dry. Seeing that Ivan again had escaped him, the little devil became greatly enraged, saying:

"He cut me all over and made me tired, that fool. I did not meet such misfortune even on the battle-field. He does not even sleep;" and the devil began to swear. "I cannot follow him," he continued. "I will go now to the heaps and make everything rotten."

Accordingly he went to a heap of the new-mown grain and began his fiendish work. After wetting it he built a fire and warmed himself, and soon was fast asleep.

Ivan harnessed his horse, and, with his sister, went to bring the rye home from the field.

After lifting a couple of sheaves from the first heap his pitchfork came into contact with the little devil's back, which caused the latter to howl with pain and to jump around in every direction. Ivan exclaimed:

"See here! What nastiness! You again here?"

"I am another one!" said the little devil. "That was my brother. I am the one who was sent to your brother Simeon."

"Well," said Ivan, "it matters not who you are. I will fix you all the same."

As Ivan was about to strike the first blow the devil pleaded:

"Let me go and I will do you no more harm. I will do whatever you wish."

"What can you do for me?" asked Ivan.

"I can make soldiers from almost anything."



"And what will they be good for?"

"Oh, they will do everything for you!"

"Can they sing?"

"They can."

"Well, make them."

"Take a bunch of straw and scatter it on the ground, and see if each straw will not turn into a soldier."

Ivan shook the straws on the ground, and, as he expected, each straw turned into a soldier, and they began marching with a band at their head.

"Ishty (look you), that was well done! How it will delight the village maidens!" he exclaimed.

The small devil now said: "Let me go; you do not need me any longer."

But Ivan said: "No, I will not let you go just yet. You have converted the straw into soldiers, and now I want you to turn them again into straw, as I cannot afford to lose it, but I want it with the grain on."

The devil replied: "Say: 'So many soldiers, so much straw.'"

Ivan did as directed, and got back his rye with the straw.

The small devil again begged for his release.

Ivan, taking him from the pitchfork, said: "With God's blessing you may depart"; and, as before at the mention of God's name, the little devil was hurled into the earth like a flash, and nothing was left but the hole to show where he had gone.

Soon afterward Ivan returned home, to find his brother Tarras and his wife there. Tarras-Briukhan could not pay his debts, and was forced to flee from his creditors and seek refuge under his father's roof. Seeing Ivan, he said: "Well, Ivan, may we remain here until I start in some new business?"

Ivan replied as he had before to Simeon: "Yes, you are per-

fectly welcome to remain here as long as it suits you."

With that announcement he removed his coat and seated himself at the supper-table with the others. But Tarras-Briukhan's wife objected to the smell of his clothes, saying: "I cannot eat with a fool; neither can I stand the smell."

Then Tarras-Briukhan said: "Ivan, from your clothes there comes a bad smell; go and eat by yourself in the porch."

"Very well," said Ivan; and he took some bread and went out as ordered, saying, "It is time for me to feed my mare."

## V

The small devil who had charge of Tarras finished with him that night, and according to agreement proceeded to the assistance of the other two to help them conquer Ivan. Arriving at the plowed field he looked around for his comrades, but found only the hole through which one had disappeared; and on going to the meadow he discovered the severed tail of the other, and in the rye-field he found yet another hole.

"Well," he thought, "it is quite clear that my comrades have met with some great misfortune, and that I will have to take their places and arrange the feud between the brothers."

The small devil then went in search of Ivan. But he, having finished with the field, was nowhere to be found. He had gone to the forest to cut logs to build homes for his brothers, as they found it inconvenient for so many to live under the same roof.

The small devil at last discovered his whereabouts, and going to the forest climbed into the branches of the trees and began to interfere with Ivan's work. Ivan cut down a tree, which failed, however, to fall to the ground, becoming entangled in the branches

of other trees; yet he succeeded in getting it down after a hard struggle. In chopping down the next tree he met with the same difficulties, and also with the third. Ivan had supposed he could cut down fifty trees in a day, but he succeeded in chopping but ten before darkness put an end to his labors for a time. He was now exhausted, and, perspiring profusely, he sat down alone in the woods to rest. He soon after resumed his work, cutting down one more tree; but the effort gave him a pain in his back, and he was obliged to rest again. Seeing this, the small devil was full of joy.

"Well," he thought, "now he is exhausted and will stop work, and I will rest also." He then seated himself on some branches and rejoiced.

Ivan again arose, however, and, taking his axe, gave the tree a terrific blow from the opposite side, which felled it instantly to the ground, carrying the little devil with it; and Ivan, proceeding to cut the branches, found the devil alive. Very much astonished, Ivan exclaimed:

"Look you! Such nastiness! Are you again here?"

"I am another one," replied the devil. "I was with your brother Tarras."

"Well," said Ivan, "that makes no difference; I will fix you." And he was about to strike him a blow with the axe when the devil pleaded:

"Do not kill me, and whatever you wish you shall have."

Ivan asked, "What can you do?"

"I can make for you all the money you wish."

Ivan then told the devil he might proceed, whereupon the latter began to explain to him how he might become rich.

"Take," said he to Ivan, "the leaves of this oak tree and rub them in your hands, and the gold will fall to the ground."

Ivan did as he was directed, and immediately the gold began to drop about his feet; and he remarked:

"This will be a fine trick to amuse the village boys with."

"Can I now take my departure?" asked the devil, to which Ivan replied, "With God's blessing you may go."

At the mention of the name of God, the devil disappeared into the earth.

## VI

The brothers, having finished their houses, moved into them and lived apart from their father and brother. Ivan, when he had completed his plowing, made a great feast, to which he invited his brothers, telling them that he had plenty of beer for them to drink. The brothers, however, declined Ivan's hospitality, saying, "We have seen the beer moujiks drink, and want none of it."

Ivan then gathered around him all the peasants in the village and with them drank beer until he became intoxicated, when he joined the Khorovody (a street gathering of the village boys and girls, who sing songs), and told them they must sing his praises, saying that in return he would show them such sights as they had never before seen in their lives. The little girls laughed and began to sing songs praising Ivan, and when they had finished they said: "Very well; now give us what you said you would."

Ivan replied, "I will soon show you," and, taking an empty bag in his hand, he started for the woods. The little girls laughed as they said, "What a fool he is!" and resuming their play they forgot all about him.

Some time after Ivan suddenly appeared among them carrying in his hand the bag, which was now filled.

"Shall I divide this with you?" he said.

"Yes; divide!" they sang in chorus.

So Ivan put his hand into the bag and drew it out full of gold coins, which he scattered among them.

"Batiushka," they cried as they ran to gather up the precious pieces.

The moujiks then appeared on the scene and began to fight among themselves for the possession of the yellow objects. In the melee one old woman was nearly crushed to death.

Ivan laughed and was greatly amused at the sight of so many persons quarrelling over a few pieces of gold.

"Oh! you duratchki" (little fools), he said, "why did you almost crush the life out of the old grandmother? Be more gentle. I have plenty more, and I will give them to you;" whereupon he began throwing about more of the coins.

The people gathered around him, and Ivan continued throwing until he emptied his bag. They clamored for more, but Ivan replied: "The gold is all gone. Another time I will give you more. Now we will resume our singing and dancing."

The little children sang, but Ivan said to them, "Your songs are no good."

The children said, "Then show us how to sing better."

To this Ivan replied, "I will show you people who can sing better than you." With that remark Ivan went to the barn and, securing a bundle of straw, did as the little devil had directed him; and presently a regiment of soldiers appeared in the village street, and he ordered them to sing and dance.

The people were astonished and could not understand how Ivan had produced the strangers.

The soldiers sang for some time, to the great delight of the villagers; and when Ivan commanded them to stop they instantly

ceased.

Ivan then ordered them off to the barn, telling the astonished and mystified moujiks that they must not follow him. Reaching the barn, he turned the soldiers again into straw and went home to sleep off the effects of his debauch.

## VII

The next morning Ivan's exploits were the talk of the village, and news of the wonderful things he had done reached the ears of his brother Simeon, who immediately went to Ivan to learn all about it.

"Explain to me," he said: "from whence did you bring the soldiers, and where did you take them?"

"And what do you wish to know for?" asked Ivan.

"Why, with soldiers we can do almost anything we wish—whole kingdoms can be conquered," replied Simeon.

This information greatly surprised Ivan, who said: "Well, why did you not tell me about this before? I can make as many as you want."

Ivan then took his brother to the barn, but he said: "While I am willing to create the soldiers, you must take them away from here; for if it should become necessary to feed them, all the food in the village would last them only one day."

Simeon promised to do as Ivan wished, whereupon Ivan proceeded to convert the straw into soldiers. Out of one bundle of straw he made an entire regiment; in fact, so many soldiers appeared as if by magic that there was not a vacant spot in the field.

Turning to Simeon Ivan said, "Well, is there a sufficient



number?"

Beaming with joy, Simeon replied: "Enough! enough! Thank you, Ivan!"

"Glad you are satisfied," said Ivan, "and if you wish more I will make them for you. I have plenty of straw now."

Simeon divided his soldiers into battalions and regiments, and after having drilled them he went forth to fight and to conquer.

Simeon had just gotten safely out of the village with his soldiers when Tarras, the other brother, appeared before Ivan—he also having heard of the previous day's performance and wanted to learn the secret of his power. He sought Ivan, saying: "Tell me the secret of your supply of gold, for if I had plenty of money I could with its assistance gather in all the wealth in the world."

Ivan was greatly surprised on hearing this statement, and said: "You might have told me this before, for I can obtain for you as much money as you wish."

Tarras was delighted, and he said, "You might get me about three bushels."

"Well," said Ivan, "we will go to the woods, or, better still, we will harness the horse, as we could not possibly carry so much money ourselves."

The brothers went to the woods and Ivan proceeded to gather the oak leaves, which he rubbed between his hands, the dust falling to the ground and turning into gold pieces as quickly as it fell.

When quite a pile had accumulated Ivan turned to Tarras and asked if he had rubbed enough leaves into money, whereupon Tarras replied: "Thank you, Ivan; that will be sufficient for this time."

Ivan then said: "If you wish more, come to me and I will rub

as much as you want, for there are plenty of leaves."

Tarras, with his tarantas (wagon) filled with gold, rode away to the city to engage in trade and increase his wealth; and thus both brothers went their way, Simeon to fight and Tarras to trade.

Simeon's soldiers conquered a kingdom for him and Tarras-Briukhan made plenty of money.

Some time afterward the two brothers met and confessed to each other the source from whence sprang their prosperity, but they were not yet satisfied.

Simeon said: "I have conquered a kingdom and enjoy a very pleasant life, but I have not sufficient money to procure food for my soldiers;" while Tarras confessed that he was the possessor of enormous wealth, but the care of it caused him much uneasiness.

"Let us go again to our brother," said Simeon; "I will order him to make more soldiers and will give them to you, and you may then tell him that he must make more money so that we can buy food for them."

They went again to Ivan, and Simeon said: "I have not sufficient soldiers; I want you to make me at least two divisions more." But Ivan shook his head as he said: "I will not create soldiers for nothing; you must pay me for doing it."

"Well, but you promised," said Simeon.

"I know I did," replied Ivan; "but I have changed my mind since that time."

"But, fool, why will you not do as you promised?"

"For the reason that your soldiers kill men, and I will not make any more for such a cruel purpose." With this reply Ivan remained stubborn and would not create any more soldiers.

Tarras-Briukhan next approached Ivan and ordered him to make more money; but, as in the case of Tarras, Ivan only shook

his head, as he said: "I will not make you any money unless you pay me for doing it. I cannot work without pay."

Tarras then reminded him of his promise.

"I know I promised," replied Ivan; "but still I must refuse to do as you wish."

"But why, fool, will you not fulfill your promise?" asked Tarras.

"For the reason that your gold was the means of depriving Mikhailovna of her cow."

"But how did that happen?" inquired Tarras.

"It happened in this way," said Ivan. "Mikhailovna always kept a cow, and her children had plenty of milk to drink; but some time ago one of her boys came to me to beg for some milk, and I asked, 'Where is your cow?' when he replied, 'A clerk of Tarras-Briukhan came to our home and offered three gold pieces for her. Our mother could not resist the temptation, and now we have no milk to drink. I gave you the gold pieces for your pleasure, and you put them to such poor use that I will not give you any more.'"

The brothers, on hearing this, took their departure to discuss as to the best plan to pursue in regard to a settlement of their troubles.

Simeon said: "Let us arrange it in this way: I will give you the half of my kingdom, and soldiers to keep guard over your wealth; and you give me money to feed the soldiers in my half of the kingdom."

To this arrangement Tarras agreed, and both the brothers became rulers and very happy.

## VIII

Ivan remained on the farm and worked to support his father, mother, and dumb sister. Once it happened that the old dog, which had grown up on the farm, was taken sick, when Ivan thought he was dying, and, taking pity on the animal, placed some bread in his hat and carried it to him. It happened that when he turned out the bread the root which the little devil had given him fell out also. The old dog swallowed it with the bread and was almost instantly cured, when he jumped up and began to wag his tail as an expression of joy. Ivan's father and mother, seeing the dog cured so quickly, asked by what means he had performed such a miracle.

Ivan replied: "I had some roots which would cure any disease, and the dog swallowed one of them."

It happened about that time that the Czar's daughter became ill, and her father had it announced in every city, town, and village that whosoever would cure her would be richly rewarded; and if the lucky person should prove to be a single man he would give her in marriage to him.

This announcement, of course, appeared in Ivan's village.

Ivan's father and mother called him and said: "If you have any of those wonderful roots, go and cure the Czar's daughter. You will be much happier for having performed such a kind act—indeed, you will be made happy for all your after life."

"Very well," said Ivan; and he immediately made ready for the journey. As he reached the porch on his way out he saw a poor woman standing directly in his path and holding a broken arm. The woman accosted him, saying:

"I was told that you could cure me, and will you not please do so, as I am powerless to do anything for myself?"

Ivan replied: "Very well, my poor woman; I will relieve you if I can."

He produced a root which he handed to the poor woman and told her to swallow it.

She did as Ivan told her and was instantly cured, and went away rejoicing that she had recovered the use of her arm.

Ivan's father and mother came out to wish him good luck on his journey, and to them he told the story of the poor woman, saying that he had given her his last root. On hearing this his parents were much distressed, as they now believed him to be without the means of curing the Czar's daughter, and began to scold him.

"You had pity for a beggar and gave no thought to the Czar's daughter," they said.

"I have pity for the Czar's daughter also," replied Ivan, after which he harnessed his horse to his wagon and took his seat ready for his departure; whereupon his parents said: "Where are you going, you fool—to cure the Czar's daughter, and without anything to do it with?"

"Very well," replied Ivan, as he drove away.

In due time he arrived at the palace, and the moment he appeared on the balcony the Czar's daughter was cured. The Czar was overjoyed and ordered Ivan to be brought into his presence. He dressed him in the richest robes and addressed him as his son-in-law. Ivan was married to the Czarevna, and, the Czar died soon after, Ivan became ruler. Thus the three brothers became rulers in different kingdoms.

## IX

The brothers lived and reigned. Simeon, the eldest brother, with his straw soldiers took captive the genuine soldiers and trained all alike. He was feared by every one.

Tarras-Briukhan, the other brother, did not squander the gold he obtained from Ivan, but instead greatly increased his wealth, and at the same time lived well. He kept his money in large trunks, and, while having more than he knew what to do with, still continued to collect money from his subjects. The people had to work for the money to pay the taxes which Tarras levied on them, and life was made burdensome to them.

Ivan the Fool did not enjoy his wealth and power to the same extent as did his brothers. As soon as his father-in-law, the late Czar, was buried, he discarded the Imperial robes which had fallen to him and told his wife to put them away, as he had no further use for them. Having cast aside the insignia of his rank, he once more donned his peasant garb and started to work as of old.

"I felt lonesome," he said, "and began to grow enormously stout, and yet I had no appetite, and neither could I sleep."

Ivan sent for his father, mother, and dumb sister, and brought them to live with him, and they worked with him at whatever he chose to do.

The people soon learned that Ivan was a fool. His wife one day said to him, "The people say you are a fool, Ivan."

"Well, let them think so if they wish," he replied.

His wife pondered this reply for some time, and at last decided that if Ivan was a fool she also was one, and that it would be useless to go contrary to her husband, thinking affectionately of the old proverb that "where the needle goes there goes the



thread also." She therefore cast aside her magnificent robes, and, putting them into the trunk with Ivan's, dressed herself in cheap clothing and joined her dumb sister-in-law, with the intention of learning to work. She succeeded so well that she soon became a great help to Ivan.

Seeing that Ivan was a fool, all the wise men left the kingdom and only the fools remained. They had no money, their wealth consisting only of the products of their labor. But they lived peacefully together, supported themselves in comfort, and had plenty to spare for the needy and afflicted.

## X

The old devil grew tired of waiting for the good news which he expected the little devils to bring him. He waited in vain to hear of the ruin of the brothers, so he went in search of the emissaries which he had sent to perform that work for him. After looking around for some time, and seeing nothing but the three holes in the ground, he decided that they had not succeeded in their work and that he would have to do it himself.

The old devil next went in search of the brothers, but he could learn nothing of their whereabouts. After some time he found them in their different kingdoms, contented and happy. This greatly incensed the old devil, and he said, "I will now have to accomplish their mission myself."

He first visited Simeon the soldier, and appeared before him as a voyevoda (general), saying: "You, Simeon, are a great warrior, and I also have had considerable experience in warfare, and am desirous of serving you."

Simeon questioned the disguised devil, and seeing that he

was an intelligent man took him into his service.

The new General taught Simeon how to strengthen his army until it became very powerful. New implements of warfare were introduced.

Cannons capable of throwing one hundred balls a minute were also constructed, and these, it was expected, would be of deadly effect in battle.

Simeon, on the advice of his new General, ordered all young men above a certain age to report for drill. On the same advice Simeon established gun-shops, where immense numbers of cannons and rifles were made.

The next move of the new General was to have Simeon declare war against the neighboring kingdom. This he did, and with his immense army marched into the adjoining territory, which he pillaged and burned, destroying more than half the enemy's soldiers. This so frightened the ruler of that country that he willingly gave up half of his kingdom to save the other half.

Simeon, overjoyed at his success, declared his intention of marching into Indian territory and subduing the Viceroy of that country.

But Simeon's intentions reached the ears of the Indian ruler, who prepared to do battle with him. In addition to having secured all the latest implements of warfare, he added still others of his own invention. He ordered all boys over fourteen and all single women to be drafted into the army, until its proportions became much larger than Simeon's. His cannons and rifles were of the same pattern as Simeon's, and he invented a flying-machine from which bombs could be thrown into the enemy's camp.

Simeon went forth to conquer the Viceroy with full confidence in his own powers to succeed. This time luck forsook him, and instead of being the conqueror he was himself conquered.

The Indian ruler had so arranged his army that Simeon could not even get within shooting distance, while the bombs from the flying-machine carried destruction and terror in their path, completely ruining his army, so that Simeon was left alone.

The Viceroy took possession of his kingdom and Simeon had to fly for his life.

Having finished with Simeon, the old devil next approached Tarras. He appeared before him disguised as one of the merchants of his kingdom, and established factories and began to make money. The "merchant" paid the highest price for everything he purchased, and the people ran after him to sell their goods. Through this "merchant" they were enabled to make plenty of money, paying up all their arrears of taxes as well as the others when they came due.

Tarras was overjoyed at this condition of affairs and said: "Thanks to this merchant, now I will have more money than before, and life will be much pleasanter for me."

He wished to erect new buildings, and advertised for workmen, offering the highest prices for all kinds of labor. Tarras thought the people would be as anxious to work as formerly, but instead he was much surprised to learn that they were working for the "merchant." Thinking to induce them to leave the "merchant," he increased his offers, but the former, equal to the emergency, also raised the wages of his workmen. Tarras, having plenty of money, increased the offers still more; but the "merchant" raised them still higher and got the better of him. Thus, defeated at every point, Tarras was compelled to abandon the idea of building.

Tarras next announced that he intended laying out gardens and erecting fountains, and the work was to be commenced in the fall, but no one came to offer his services, and again he was

obliged to forego his intentions. Winter set in, and Tarras wanted some sable fur with which to line his great-coat, and he sent his man to procure it for him; but the servant returned without it, saying: "There are no sables to be had. The 'merchant' has bought them all, paying a very high price for them."

Tarras needed horses and sent a messenger to purchase them, but he returned with the same story as on former occasions—that none were to be found, the "merchant" having bought them all to carry water for an artificial pond he was constructing. Tarras was at last compelled to suspend business, as he could not find any one willing to work for him. They had all gone over to the "merchant's" side. The only dealings the people had with Tarras were when they went to pay their taxes. His money accumulated so fast that he could not find a place to put it, and his life became miserable. He abandoned all idea of entering upon the new venture, and only thought of how to exist peaceably. This he found it difficult to do. for, turn which way he would, fresh obstacles confronted him. Even his cooks, coachmen, and all his other servants forsook him and joined the "merchant." With all his wealth he had nothing to eat, and when he went to market he found the "merchant" had been there before him and had bought up all the provisions. Still, the people continued to bring him money.

Tarras at last became so indignant that he ordered the "merchant" out of his kingdom. He left, but settled just outside the boundary line, and continued his business with the same result as before, and Tarras was frequently forced to go without food for days. It was rumored that the "merchant" wanted to buy even Tarras himself. On hearing this the latter became very much alarmed and could not decide as to the best course to pursue.

About this time his brother Simeon arrived in the kingdom,

and said: "Help me, for I have been defeated and ruined by the Indian Viceroy."

Tarras replied: "How can I help you, when I have had no food myself for two days?"

## XI

The old devil, having finished with the second brother, went to Ivan the Fool. This time he disguised himself as a General, the same as in the case of Simeon, and, appearing before Ivan, said: "Get an army together. It is disgraceful for the ruler of a kingdom to be without an army. You call your people to assemble, and I will form them into a fine large army."

Ivan took the supposed General's advice, and said: "Well, you may form my people into an army, but you must also teach them to sing the songs I like."

The old devil then went through Ivan's kingdom to secure recruits for the army, saying: "Come, shave your heads [the heads of recruits are always shaved in Russia] and I will give each of you a red hat and plenty of vodki" (whisky).

At this the fools only laughed, and said: "We can have all the vodki we want, for we distill it ourselves; and of hats, our little girls make all we want, of any color we please, and with handsome fringes."

Thus was the devil foiled in securing recruits for his army; so he returned to Ivan and said: "Your fools will not volunteer to be soldiers. It will therefore be necessary to force them."

"Very well," replied Ivan, "you may use force if you want to."

The old devil then announced that all the fools must become soldiers, and those who refused, Ivan would punish with death.



The fools went to the General; and said: "You tell us that Ivan will punish with death all those who refuse to become soldiers, but you have omitted to state what will be done with us soldiers.

We have been told that we are only to be killed."

"Yes, that is true," was the reply.

The fools on hearing this became stubborn and refused to go.

"Better kill us now if we cannot avoid death, but we will not become soldiers," they declared.

"Oh! you fools," said the old devil, "soldiers may and may not be killed; but if you disobey Ivan's orders you will find certain death at his hands."

The fools remained absorbed in thought for some time and finally went to Ivan to question him in regard to the matter.

On arriving at his house they said: "A General came to us with an order from you that we were all to become soldiers, and if we refused you were to punish us with death. Is it true?"

Ivan began to laugh heartily on hearing this, and said: "Well, how I alone can punish you with death is something I cannot understand. If I was not a fool myself I would be able to explain it to you, but as it is I cannot."

"Well, then, we will not go," they said.

"Very well," replied Ivan, "you need not become soldiers unless you wish to."

The old devil, seeing his schemes about to prove failures, went to the ruler of Tarakanja and became his friend, saying: "Let us go and conquer Ivan's kingdom. He has no money, but he has plenty of cattle, provisions, and various other things that would be useful to us."

The Tarakanian ruler gathered his large army together, and equipping it with cannons and rifles, crossed the boundary line into Ivan's kingdom. The people went to Ivan and said: "The



ruler of Tarakania is here with a large army to fight us."

"Let them come," replied Ivan.

The Tarakanian ruler, after crossing the line into Ivan's kingdom, looked in vain for soldiers to fight against; and waiting some time and none appearing, he sent his own warriors to attack the villages.

They soon reached the first village, which they began to plunder.

The fools of both sexes looked calmly on, offering not the least resistance when their cattle and provisions were being taken from them. On the contrary, they invited the soldiers to come and live with them, saying: "If you, dear friends, find it is difficult to earn a living in your own land, come and live with us, where everything is plentiful."

The soldiers decided to remain, finding the people happy and prosperous, with enough surplus food to supply many of their neighbors. They were surprised at the cordial greetings which they everywhere received, and, returning to the ruler of Tarakania, they said: "We cannot fight with these people—take us to another place. We would much prefer the dangers of actual warfare to this unsoldierly method of subduing the village."

The Tarakanian ruler, becoming enraged, ordered the soldiers to destroy the whole kingdom, plunder the villages, burn the houses and provisions, and slaughter the cattle.

"Should you disobey my orders," said he, "I will have every one of you executed."

The soldiers, becoming frightened, started to do as they were ordered, but the fools wept bitterly, offering no resistance, men, women, and children all joining in the general lamentation.

"Why do you treat us so cruelly?" they cried to the invading soldiers. "Why do you wish to destroy everything we have? If

you have more need of these things than we have, why not take them with you and leave us in peace?"

The soldiers, becoming saddened with remorse, refused further to pursue their path of destruction—the entire army scattering in many directions.

## XII

The old devil, failing to ruin Ivan's kingdom with soldiers, transformed himself into a nobleman, dressed exquisitely, and became one of Ivan's subjects, with the intention of compassing the downfall of his kingdom—as he had done with that of Tarras.

The "nobleman" said to Ivan: "I desire to teach you wisdom and to render you other service. I will build you a palace and factories."

"Very well," said Ivan; "you may live with us."

The next day the "nobleman" appeared on the Square with a sack of gold in his hand and a plan for building a house, saying to the people: "You are living like pigs, and I am going to teach you how to live decently. You are to build a house for me according to this plan. I will superintend the work myself, and will pay you for your services in gold," showing them at the same time the contents of his sack.

The fools were amused. They had never before seen any money. Their business was conducted entirely by exchange of farm products or by hiring themselves out to work by the day in return for whatever they most needed. They therefore glanced at the gold pieces with amazement, and said, "What nice toys they would be to play with!" In return for the gold they gave their services and brought the "nobleman" the produce of their farms.

The old devil was overjoyed as he thought, "Now my enter-

prise is on a fair road and I will be able to ruin the Fool—as I did his brothers.”

The fools obtained sufficient gold to distribute among the entire community, the women and young girls of the village wearing much of it as ornaments, while to the children they gave some pieces to play with on the streets.

When they had secured all they wanted they stopped working and the “noblemen” did not get his house more than half finished. He had neither provisions nor cattle for the year, and ordered the people to bring him both. He directed them also to go on with the building of the palace and factories. He promised to pay them liberally in gold for everything they did. No one responded to his call—only once in awhile a little boy or girl would call to exchange eggs for his gold.

Thus was the “nobleman” deserted, and, having nothing to eat, he went to the village to procure some provisions for his dinner. He went to one house and offered gold in return for a chicken, but was refused, the owner saying: “We have enough of that already and do not want any more.”

He next went to a fish-woman to buy some herring, when she, too, refused to accept his gold in return for fish, saying: “I do not wish it, my dear man; I have no children to whom I can give it to play with. I have three pieces which I keep as curiosities only.”

He then went to a peasant to buy bread, but he also refused to accept the gold. “I have no use for it,” said he, “unless you wish to give it for Christ’s sake; then it will be a different matter, and I will tell my baba [old woman] to cut a piece of bread for you.”

The old devil was so angry that he ran away from the peasant, spitting and cursing as he went.

Not only did the offer to accept in the name of Christ anger him, but the very mention of the name was like the thrust of a knife in his throat.

The old devil did not succeed in getting any bread, and in his efforts to secure other articles of food he met with the same failure. The people had all the gold they wanted and what pieces they had they regarded as curiosities. They said to the old devil: "If you bring us something else in exchange for food, or come to ask for Christ's sake, we will give you all you want."

But the old devil had nothing but gold, and was too lazy to work; and being unable to accept anything for Christ's sake, he was greatly enraged.

"What else do you want?" he said. "I will give you gold with which you can buy everything you want, and you need labor no longer."

But the fools would not accept his gold, nor listen to him. Thus the old devil was obliged to go to sleep hungry.

Tidings of this condition of affairs soon reached the ears of Ivan. The people went to him and said: "What shall we do? This nobleman appeared among us; he is well dressed; he wishes to eat and drink of the best, but is unwilling to work, and does not beg for food for Christ's sake. He only offers every one gold pieces. At first we gave him everything he wanted, taking the gold pieces in exchange just as curiosities; but now we have enough of them and refuse to accept any more from him. What shall we do with him? he may die of hunger!"

Ivan heard all they had to say, and told them to employ him as a shepherd, taking turns in doing so.

The old devil saw no other way out of the difficulty and was obliged to submit.

It soon came the old devil's turn to go to Ivan's house. He

went there to dinner and found Ivan's dumb sister preparing the meal. She was often cheated by the lazy people, who while they did not work, yet ate up all the gruel. But she learned to know the lazy people from the condition of their hands. Those with great welts on their hands she invited first to the table, and those having smooth white hands had to take what was left.

The old devil took a seat at the table, but the dumb girl, taking his hands, looked at them, and seeing them white and clean, and with long nails, swore at him and put him from the table.

Ivan's wife said to the old devil: "You must excuse my sister-in-law; she will not allow any one to sit at the table whose hands have not been hardened by toil, so you will have to wait until the dinner is over and then you can have what is left.

With it you must be satisfied."

The old devil was very much offended that he was made to eat with "pigs," as he expressed it, and complained to Ivan, saying: "The foolish law you have in your kingdom, that all persons must work, is surely the invention of fools. People who work for a living are not always forced to labor with their hands. Do you think wise men labor so?"

Ivan replied: "Well, what do fools know about it? We all work with our hands."

"And for that reason you are fools," replied the devil. "I can teach you how to use your brains, and you will find such labor more beneficial."

Ivan was surprised at hearing this, and said:

"Well, it is perhaps not without good reason that we are called fools."

"It is not so easy to work with the brain," the old devil said. "You will not give me anything to eat because my hands have



not the appearance of being toil-hardened, but you must understand that it is much harder to do brain-work, and sometimes the head feels like bursting with the effort it is forced to make."

"Then why do you not select some light work that you can perform with your hands?" Ivan asked.

The devil said: "I torment myself with brain-work because I have pity for you fools, for, if I did not torture myself, people like you would remain fools for all eternity. I have exercised my brain a great deal during my life, and now I am able to teach you."

Ivan was greatly surprised and said: "Very well; teach us, so that when our hands are tired we can use our heads to replace them."

The devil promised to instruct the people, and Ivan announced the fact throughout his kingdom.

The devil was willing to teach all those who came to him how to use the head instead of the hands, so as to produce more with the former than with the latter.

In Ivan's kingdom there was a high tower, which was reached by a long, narrow ladder leading up to the balcony, and Ivan told the old devil that from the top of the tower every one could see him.

So the old devil went up to the balcony and addressed the people.

The fools came in great crowds to hear what the old devil had to say, thinking that he really meant to tell them how to work with the head. But the old devil only told them in words what to do, and did not give them any practical instruction. He said that men working only with their hands could not make a living. The fools did not understand what he said to them and looked at him in amazement, and then departed for their daily work.



The old devil addressed them for two days from the balcony, and at the end of that time, feeling hungry, he asked the people to bring him some bread. But they only laughed at him and told him if he could work better with his head than with his hands he could also find bread for himself. He addressed the people for yet another day, and they went to hear him from curiosity, but soon left him to return to their work.

Ivan asked, "Well, did the nobleman work with his head?"

"Not yet," they said; "so far he has only talked."

One day, while the old devil was standing on the balcony, he became weak, and, falling down, hurt his head against a pole.

Seeing this, one of the fools ran to Ivan's wife and said, "The gentleman has at last commenced to work with his head."

She ran to the field to tell Ivan, who was much surprised, and said, "Let us go and see him."

He turned his horses' heads in the direction of the tower, where the old devil remained weak from hunger and was still suspended from the pole, with his body swaying back and forth and his head striking the lower part of the pole each time it came in contact with it. While Ivan was looking, the old devil started down the steps head-first—as they supposed, to count them.

"Well," said Ivan, "he told the truth after all—that sometimes from this kind of work the head bursts. This is far worse than welts on the hands."

The old devil fell to the ground head-foremost. Ivan approached him, but at that instant the ground opened and the devil disappeared, leaving only a hole to show where he had gone.

Ivan scratched his head and said: "See here; such nastiness!

This is yet another devil. He looks like the father of the little ones."

Ivan still lives, and people flock to his kingdom. His brothers

come to him and he feeds them.

To every one who comes to him and says, "Give us food," he replies: "Very well; you are welcome. We have plenty of everything."

There is only one unchangeable custom observed in Ivan's kingdom:

The man with toil-hardened hands is always given a seat at the table, while the possessor of soft white hands must be contented with what is left.

# Polikushka

## I

Polikey was a court man—one of the staff of servants belonging to the court household of a boyarinia (lady of the nobility).

He held a very insignificant position on the estate, and lived in a rather poor, small house with his wife and children.

The house was built by the deceased nobleman whose widow he still continued to serve, and may be described as follows: The four walls surrounding the one izba (room) were built of stone, and the interior was ten yards square. A Russian stove stood in the centre, around which was a free passage. Each corner was fenced off as a separate inclosure to the extent of several feet, and the one nearest to the door (the smallest of all) was known as "Polikey's corner." Elsewhere in the room stood the bed (with quilt, sheet, and cotton pillows), the cradle (with a baby lying therein), and the three-legged table, on which the meals were prepared and the family washing was done. At the latter also Polikey was at work on the preparation of some materials for use in his profession—that of an amateur veterinary surgeon. A calf, some hens, the family clothes and household utensils, together with seven persons, filled the little home to the utmost of its capacity. It would indeed have been almost impossible for them to move around had it not been for the convenience of the stove, on which some of them slept at night, and which served as a table in the day-time.

It seemed hard to realize how so many persons managed to live in such close quarters.

Polikey's wife, Akulina, did the washing, spun and wove, bleached her linen, cooked and baked, and found time also to quarrel and gossip with her neighbors.

The monthly allowance of food which they received from the noblewoman's house was amply sufficient for the whole family, and there was always enough meal left to make mash for the cow. Their fuel they got free, and likewise the food for the cattle. In addition they were given a small piece of land on which to raise vegetables. They had a cow, a calf, and a number of chickens to care for.

Polikey was employed in the stables to take care of two stallions, and, when necessary, to breed the horses and cattle and clean their hoofs.

In his treatment of the animals he used syringes, plasters, and various other remedies and appliances of his own invention. For these services he received whatever provisions were required by his family, and a certain sum of money—all of which would have been sufficient to enable them to live comfortably and even happily, if their hearts had not been filled with the shadow of a great sorrow.

This shadow darkened the lives of the entire family.

Polikey, while young, was employed in a horse-breeding establishment in a neighboring village. The head stableman was a notorious horse-thief, known far and wide as a great rogue, who, for his many misdeeds, was finally exiled to Siberia. Under his instruction Polikey underwent a course of training, and, being but a boy, was easily induced to perform many evil deeds. He became so expert in the various kinds of wickedness practiced by his teacher that, though he many times would gladly have aban-

done his evil ways, he could not, owing to the great hold these early-formed habits had upon him. His father and mother died when he was but a child, and he had no one to point out to him the paths of virtue.

In addition to his other numerous shortcomings, Polikey was fond of strong drink. He also had a habit of appropriating other people's property, when the opportunity offered of his doing so without being seen. Collar-straps, padlocks, perch-bolts, and things even of greater value belonging to others found their way with remarkable rapidity and in great quantities to Polikey's home. He did not, however, keep such things for his own use, but sold them whenever he could find a purchaser. His payment consisted chiefly of whiskey, though sometimes he received cash.

This sort of employment, as his neighbors said, was both light and profitable; it required neither education nor labor. It had one drawback, however, which was calculated to reconcile his victims to their losses: Though he could for a time have all his needs supplied without expending either labor or money, there was always the possibility of his methods being discovered; and this result was sure to be followed by a long term of imprisonment. This impending danger made life a burden for Polikey and his family.

Such a setback indeed very nearly happened to Polikey early in his career. He married while still young, and God gave him much happiness. His wife, who was a shepherd's daughter, was a strong, intelligent, hard-working woman. She bore him many children, each of whom was said to be better than the preceding one.

Polikey still continued to steal, but once was caught with some small articles belonging to others in his possession. Among them was a pair of leather reins, the property of another peasant,

who beat him severely and reported him to his mistress.

From that time on Polikey was an object of suspicion, and he was twice again detected in similar escapades. By this time the people began to abuse him, and the clerk of the court threatened to recruit him into the army as a soldier (which is regarded by the peasants as a great punishment and disgrace). His noble mistress severely reprimanded him; his wife wept from grief for his downfall, and everything went from bad to worse.

Polikey, notwithstanding his weakness, was a good-natured sort of man, but his love of strong drink had so overcome every moral instinct that at times he was scarcely responsible for his actions. This habit he vainly endeavored to overcome. It often happened that when he returned home intoxicated, his wife, losing all patience, cursed him and cruelly beat him. At times he would cry like a child, and bemoan his fate, saying: "Unfortunate man that I am, what shall I do? *Let my eyes burst into pieces* if I do not forever give up the vile habit! I will not again touch vodka."

In spite of all his promises of reform, but a short period (perhaps a month) would elapse when Polikey would again mysteriously disappear from his home and be lost for several days on a spree.

"From what source does he get the money he spends so freely?" the neighbors inquired of each other, as they sadly shook their heads.

One of his most unfortunate exploits in the matter of stealing was in connection with a clock which belonged to the estate of his mistress. The clock stood in the private office of the noblewoman, and was so old as to have outlived its usefulness, and was simply kept as an heirloom. It so happened that Polikey went into the office one day when no one was present but him-



self, and, seeing the old clock, it seemed to possess a peculiar fascination for him, and he speedily transferred it to his person. He carried it to a town not far from the village, where he very readily found a purchaser.

As if purposely to secure his punishment, it happened that the storekeeper to whom he sold it proved to be a relative of one of the court servants, and who, when he visited his friend on the next holiday, related all about his purchase of the clock.

An investigation was immediately instituted, and all the details of Polikey's transaction were brought to light and reported to his noble mistress. He was called into her presence, and, when confronted with the story of the theft, broke down and confessed all. He fell on his knees before the noblewoman and plead with her for mercy. The kind-hearted lady lectured him about God, the salvation of his soul, and his future life. She talked to him also about the misery and disgrace he brought upon his family, and altogether so worked upon his feelings that he cried like a child. In conclusion his kind mistress said: "I will forgive you this time on the condition that you promise faithfully to reform, and never again to take what does not belong to you."

Polikey, still weeping, replied: "I will never steal again in all my life, and if I break my promise may the earth open and swallow me up, and let my body be burned with red-hot irons!"

Polikey returned to his home, and throwing himself on the oven spent the entire day weeping and repeating the promise made to his mistress.

From that time on he was not again caught stealing, but his life became extremely sad, for he was regarded with suspicion by every one and pointed to as a thief.

When the time came round for securing recruits for the army, all the peasants singled out Polikey as the first to be taken. The

superintendent was especially anxious to get rid of him, and went to his mistress to induce her to have him sent away. The kind-hearted and merciful woman, remembering the peasant's repentance, refused to grant the superintendent's request, and told him he must take some other man in his stead.

## II

One evening Polikey was sitting on his bed beside the table, preparing some medicine for the cattle, when suddenly the door was thrown wide open, and Aksiutka, a young girl from the court, rushed in. Almost out of breath, she said: "My mistress has ordered you, Polikey Illitch [son of Ilia], to come up to the court at once!"

The girl was standing and still breathing heavily from her late exertion as she continued: "Egor Mikhailovitch, the superintendent, has been to see our lady about having you drafted into the army, and, Polikey Illitch, your name was mentioned among others. Our lady has sent me to tell you to come up to the court immediately."

As soon as Aksiutka had delivered her message she left the room in the same abrupt manner in which she had entered.

Akulina, without saying a word, got up and brought her husband's boots to him. They were poor, worn-out things which some soldier had given him, and his wife did not glance at him as she handed them to him.

"Are you going to change your shirt, Illitch?" she asked, at last.

"No," replied Polikey.

Akulina did not once look at him all the time he was putting

on his boots and preparing to go to the court. Perhaps, after all, it was better that she did not do so. His face was very pale and his lips trembled. He slowly combed his hair and was about to depart without saying a word, when his wife stopped him to arrange the ribbon on his shirt, and, after toying a little with his coat, she put his hat on for him and he left the little home.

Polikey's next-door neighbors were a joiner and his wife. A thin partition only separated the two families, and each could hear what the other said and did. Soon after Polikey's departure a woman was heard to say: "Well, Polikey Illitch, so your mistress has sent for you!"

The voice was that of the joiner's wife on the other side of the partition. Akulina and the woman had quarrelled that morning about some trifling thing done by one of Polikey's children, and it afforded her the greatest pleasure to learn that her neighbor had been summoned into the presence of his noble mistress. She looked upon such a circumstance as a bad omen. She continued talking to herself and said: "Perhaps she wants to send him to the town to make some purchases for her household. I did not suppose she would select such a faithful man as you are to perform such a service for her. If it should prove that she does want to send you to the next town, just buy me a quarter-pound of tea. Will you, Polikey Illitch?"

Poor Akulina, on hearing the joiner's wife talking so unkindly of her husband, could hardly suppress the tears, and, the tirade continuing, she at last became angry, and wished she could in some way punish her.

Forgetting her neighbor's unkindness, her thoughts soon turned in another direction, and glancing at her sleeping children she said to herself that they might soon be orphans and she herself a soldier's widow. This thought greatly distressed her, and bury-

ing her face in her hands she seated herself on the bed, where several of her progeny were fast asleep. Presently a little voice interrupted her meditations by crying out, "Mamushka (little mother), you are crushing me," and the child pulled her night-dress from under her mother's arms.

Akulina, with her head still resting on her hands, said: "Perhaps it would be better if we all should die. I only seem to have brought you into the world to suffer sorrow and misery."

Unable longer to control her grief, she burst into violent weeping, which served to increase the amusement of the joiner's wife, who had not forgotten the morning's squabble, and she laughed loudly at her neighbor's woe.

### III

About half an hour had passed when the youngest child began to cry and Akulina arose to feed it. She had by this time ceased to weep, and after feeding the infant she again fell into her old position, with her face buried in her hands. She was very pale, but this only increased her beauty. After a time she raised her head, and staring at the burning candle she began to question herself as to why she had married, and as to the reason that the Czar required so many soldiers.

Presently she heard steps outside, and knew that her husband was returning. She hurriedly wiped away the last traces of her tears as she arose to let him pass into the centre of the room.

Polikey made his appearance with a look of triumph on his face, threw his hat on the bed, and hastily removed his coat; but not a word did he utter.

Akulina, unable to restrain her impatience, asked, "Well, what

did she want with you?"

"Pshaw!" he replied, "it is very well known that Polikushka is considered the worst man in the village; but when it comes to business of importance, who is selected then? Why, Polikushka, of course."

"What kind of business?" Akulina timidly inquired.

But Polikey was in no hurry to answer her question. He lighted his pipe with a very imposing air, and spit several times on the floor before he replied.

Still retaining his pompous manner, he said, "She has ordered me to go to a certain merchant in the town and collect a considerable sum of money."

"You to collect money?" questioned Akulina.

Polikey only shook his head and smiled significantly, saying:

"'You,' the mistress said to me, 'are a man resting under a grave suspicion—a man who is considered unsafe to trust in any capacity; but I have faith in you, and will intrust you with this important business of mine in preference to any one else.'"

Polikey related all this in a loud voice, so that his neighbor might hear what he had to say.

"'You promised me to reform,' my noble mistress said to me, 'and I will be the first to show you how much faith I have in your promise. I want you to ride into town, and, going to the principal merchant there, collect a sum of money from him and bring it to me.' I said to my mistress: 'Everything you order shall be done. I will only too gladly obey your slightest wish.'"

Then my mistress said: 'Do you understand, Polikey, that your future lot depends upon the faithful performance of this duty I impose upon you?' I replied: 'Yes, I understand everything, and feel that I will succeed in performing acceptably any task which you may impose upon me. I have been accused of

every kind of evil deed that it is possible to charge a man with, but I have never done anything seriously wrong against you, your honor.' In this way I talked to our mistress until I succeeded in convincing her that my repentance was sincere, and she became greatly softened toward me, saying, 'If you are successful I will give you the first place at the court.'"

"And how much money are you to collect?" inquired Akulina.

"Fifteen hundred rubles," carelessly answered Polikey.

Akulina sadly shook her head as she asked, "When are you to start?"

"She ordered me to leave here tomorrow," Polikey replied. 'Take any horse you please,' she said. 'Come to the office, and I will see you there and wish you God speed on your journey.'"

"Glory to Thee, O Lord!" said Akulina, as she arose and made the sign of the cross. "God, I am sure, will bless you, Illitch," she added, in a whisper, so that the people on the other side of the partition could not hear what she said, all the while holding on to his sleeve. "Illitch," she cried at last, excitedly, "for God's sake promise me that you will not touch a drop of vodka. Take an oath before God, and kiss the cross, so that I may be sure that you will not break your promise!"

Polikey replied in most contemptuous tones: "Do you think I will dare to touch vodka when I shall have such a large sum of money in my care?"

"Akulina, have a clean shirt ready for the morning," were his parting words for the night.

So Polikey and his wife went to sleep in a happy frame of mind and full of bright dreams for the future.



## IV

Very early the next morning, almost before the stars had hidden themselves from view, there was seen standing before Polikey's home a low wagon, the same in which the superintendent himself used to ride; and harnessed to it was a large-boned, dark-brown mare, called for some unknown reason by the name of Baraban (drum). Aniutka, Polikey's eldest daughter, in spite of the heavy rain and the cold wind which was blowing, stood outside barefooted and held (not without some fear) the reins in one hand, while with the other she endeavored to keep her green and yellow overcoat wound around her body, and also to hold Polikey's sheepskin coat.

In the house there were the greatest noise and confusion. The morning was still so dark that the little daylight there failed to penetrate through the broken panes of glass, the window being stuffed in many places with rags and paper to exclude the cold air.

Akulina ceased her cooking for a while and helped to get Polikey ready for the journey. Most of the children were still in bed, very likely as a protection against the cold, for Akulina had taken away the big overcoat which usually covered them and had substituted a shawl of her own. Polikey's shirt was all ready, nice and clean, but his shoes badly needed repairing, and this fact caused his devoted wife much anxiety. She took from her own feet the thick woollen stockings she was wearing, and gave them to Polikey. She then began to repair his shoes, patching up the holes so as to protect his feet from dampness.

While this was going on he was sitting on the side of the bed with his feet dangling over the edge, and trying to turn the sash which confined his coat at the waist. He was anxious to look as

clean as possible, and he declared his sash looked like a dirty rope.

One of his daughters, enveloped in a sheepskin coat, was sent to a neighbor's house to borrow a hat.

Within Polikey's home the greatest confusion reigned, for the court servants were constantly arriving with innumerable small orders which they wished Polikey to execute for them in town. One wanted needles, another tea, another tobacco, and last came the joiner's wife, who by this time had prepared her samovar, and, anxious to make up the quarrel of the previous day, brought the traveller a cup of tea.

Neighbor Nikita refused the loan of the hat, so the old one had to be patched up for the occasion. This occupied some time, as there were many holes in it.

Finally Polikey was all ready, and jumping on the wagon started on his journey, after first making the sign of the cross.

At the last moment his little boy, Mishka, ran to the door, begging to be given a short ride; and then his little daughter, Mashka, appeared on the scene and pleaded that she, too, might have a ride, declaring that she would be quite warm enough without furs.

Polikey stopped the horse on hearing the children, and Akulina placed them in the wagon, together with two others belonging to a neighbor—all anxious to have a short ride.

As Akulina helped the little ones into the wagon she took occasion to remind Polikey of the solemn promise he had made her not to touch a drop of vodka during the journey.

Polikey drove the children as far as the blacksmith's place, where he let them out of the wagon, telling them they must return home. He then arranged his clothing, and, setting his hat firmly on his head, started his horse on a trot.

The two children, Mishka and Mashka, both barefooted, started running at such a rapid pace that a strange dog from another village, seeing them flying over the road, dropped his tail between his legs and ran home squealing.

The weather was very cold, a sharp cutting wind blowing continuously; but this did not disturb Polikey, whose mind was engrossed with pleasant thoughts. As he rode through the wintry blasts he kept repeating to himself: "So I am the man they wanted to send to Siberia, and whom they threatened to enroll as a soldier—the same man whom every one abused, and said he was lazy, and who was pointed out as a thief and given the meanest work on the estate to do! Now I am going to receive a large sum of money, for which my mistress is sending me because she trusts me. I am also riding in the same wagon that the superintendent himself uses when he is riding as a representative of the court. I have the same harness, leather horse-collar, reins, and all the other gear."

Polikey, filled with pride at thought of the mission with which he had been intrusted, drew himself up with an air of pride, and, fixing his old hat more firmly on his head, buttoned his coat tightly about him and urged his horse to greater speed.

"Just to think," he continued; "I shall have in my possession three thousand half-rubles (the peasant manner of speaking of money so as to make it appear a larger sum than it really is), and will carry them in my bosom. If I wished to I might run away to Odessa instead of taking the money to my mistress. But no; I will not do that. I will surely carry the money straight to the one who has been kind enough to trust me."

When Polikey reached the first kabak (tavern) he found that from long habit the mare was naturally turning her head toward it; but he would not allow her to stop, though money had been

given to him to purchase both food and drink. Striking the animal a sharp blow with the whip, he passed by the tavern. The performance was repeated when he reached the next kabak, which looked very inviting; but he resolutely set his face against entering, and passed on.

About noon he arrived at his destination, and getting down from the wagon approached the gate of the merchant's house where the servants of the court always stopped. Opening it he led the mare through, and (after unharnessing her) fed her. This done, he next entered the house and had dinner with the merchant's working man, and to them he related what an important mission he had been sent on, making himself very amusing by the pompous air which he assumed. Dinner over, he carried a letter to the merchant which the noblewoman had given him to deliver.

The merchant, knowing thoroughly the reputation which Polikey bore, felt doubtful of trusting him with so much money, and somewhat anxiously inquired if he really had received orders to carry so many rubles.

Polikey tried to appear offended at this question, but did not succeed, and he only smiled.

The merchant, after reading the letter a second time and being convinced that all was right, gave Polikey the money, which he put in his bosom for safe-keeping.

On his way to the house he did not once stop at any of the shops he passed. The clothing establishments possessed no attractions for him, and after he had safely passed them all he stood for a moment, feeling very pleased that he had been able to withstand temptation, and then went on his way.

"I have money enough to buy up everything," he said; "but I will not do so."

The numerous commissions which he had received compelled

him to go to the bazaar. There he bought only what had been ordered, but he could not resist the temptation to ask the price of a very handsome sheep-skin coat which attracted his attention. The merchant to whom he spoke looked at Polikey and smiled, not believing that he had sufficient money to purchase such an expensive coat. But Polikey, pointing to his breast, said that he could buy out the whole shop if he wished to. He thereupon ordered the shop-keeper to take his measure. He tried the coat on and looked himself over carefully, testing the quality and blowing upon the hair to see that none of it came out. Finally, heaving a deep sigh, he took it off.

"The price is too high," he said. "If you could let me have it for fifteen rubles—"

But the merchant cut him short by snatching the coat from him and throwing it angrily to one side.

Polikey left the bazaar and returned to the merchant's house in high spirits.

After supper he went out and fed the mare, and prepared everything for the night. Returning to the house he got up on the stove to rest, and while there he took out the envelope which contained the money and looked long and earnestly at it. He could not read, but asked one of those present to tell him what the writing on the envelope meant. It was simply the address and the announcement that it contained fifteen hundred rubles.

The envelope was made of common paper and was sealed with dark-brown sealing wax. There was one large seal in the center and four smaller ones at the corners. Polikey continued to examine it carefully, even inserting his finger till he touched the crisp notes. He appeared to take a childish delight in having so much money in his possession.

Having finished his examination, he put the envelope inside



the lining of his old battered hat, and placing both under his head he went to sleep: but during the night he frequently awoke and always felt to know if the money was safe. Each time that he found that it was safe he rejoiced at the thought that he, Polikey, abused and regarded by every one as a thief, was intrusted with the care of such a large sum of money, and also that he was about to return with it quite as safely as the superintendent himself could have done.

## V

Before dawn the next morning Polikey was up, and after harnessing the mare and looking in his hat to see that the money was alright, he started on his return journey.

Many times on the way Polikey took off his hat to see that the money was safe. Once he said to himself, "I think that perhaps it would be better if I should put it in my bosom." This would necessitate the untying of his sash, so he decided to keep it still in his hat, or until he should have made half the journey, when he would be compelled to stop to feed his horse and to rest.

He said to himself: "The lining is not sewn in very strongly and the envelope might fall out, so I think I had better not take off my hat until I reach home."

The money was safe—at least, so it seemed to him—and he began to think how grateful his mistress would be to him, and in his excited imagination he saw the five rubles he was so sure of receiving.

Once more he examined the hat to see that the money was safe, and finding everything all right he put on his hat and pulled it well down over his ears, smiling all the while at his own



thoughts.

Akulina had carefully sewed all the holes in the hat, but it burst out in other places owing to Polikey's removing it so often.

In the darkness he did not notice the new rents, and tried to push the envelope further under the lining, and in doing so pushed one corner of it through the plush.

The sun was getting high in the heavens, and Polikey having slept but little the previous night and feeling its warm rays fell fast asleep, after first pressing his hat more firmly on his head. By this action he forced the envelope still further through the plush, and as he rode along his head bobbed up and down.

Polikey did not awake till he arrived near his own house, and his first act was to put his hand to his head to learn if his hat was all right. Finding that it was in its place, he did not think it necessary to examine it and see that the money was safe. Touching the mare gently with the whip she started into a trot, and as he rode along he arranged in his own mind how much he was to receive. With the air of a man already holding a high position at the court, he looked around him with an expression of lofty scorn on his face.

As he neared his house he could see before him the one room which constituted their humble home, and the joiner's wife next door carrying her rolls of linen. He saw also the office of the court and his mistress's house, where he hoped he would be able presently to prove that he was an honest, trustworthy man.

He reasoned with himself that any person can be abused by lying tongues, but when his mistress would see him she would say: "Well done, Polikey; you have shown that you can be honest. Here are three—it may be five—perhaps ten—rubles for you;" and also she would order tea for him, and might treat him to vodki—who knows?

The latter thought gave him great pleasure, as he was feeling very cold.

Speaking aloud he said: "What a happy holy-day we can have with ten rubles! Having so much money, I could pay Nikita the four rubles fifty kopecks which I owe him, and yet have some left to buy shoes for the children."

When near the house Polikey began to arrange his clothes, smoothing down his fur collar, re-tying his sash, and stroking his hair. To do the latter he had to take off his hat, and when doing so felt in the lining for the envelope. Quicker and quicker he ran his hand around the lining, and not finding the money used both hands, first one and then the other. But the envelope was not to be found.

Polikey was by this time greatly distressed, and his face was white with fear as he passed his hand through the crown of his old hat. Polikey stopped the mare and began a diligent search through the wagon and its contents. Not finding the precious envelope, he felt in all his pockets—*But the money could not be found!*

Wildly clutching at his hair, he exclaimed: "Batiushka! What will I do now? What will become of me?" At the same time he realized that he was near his neighbors' house and could be seen by them; so he turned the mare around, and, pulling his hat down securely upon his head, he rode quickly back in search of his lost treasure.

## VI

The whole day passed without any one in the village of Pokrovski having seen anything of Polikey. During the afternoon his mistress inquired many times as to his whereabouts, and sent Aksiutka

frequently to Akulina, who each time sent back word that Polikey had not yet returned, saying also that perhaps the merchant had kept him, or that something had happened to the mare.

His poor wife felt a heavy load upon her heart, and was scarcely able to do her housework and put everything in order for the next day (which was to be a holy-day). The children also anxiously awaited their father's appearance, and, though for different reasons, could hardly restrain their impatience. The noblewoman and Akulina were concerned only in regard to Polikey himself, while the children were interested most in what he would bring them from the town.

The only news received by the villagers during the day concerning Polikey was to the effect that neighboring peasants had seen him running up and down the road and asking every one he met if he or she had found an envelope.

One of them had seen him also walking by the side of his tired-out horse. "I thought," said he, "that the man was drunk, and had not fed his horse for two days—the animal looked so exhausted."

Unable to sleep, and with her heart palpitating at every sound, Akulina lay awake all night vainly awaiting Polikey's return.

When the cock crowed the third time she was obliged to get up to attend to the fire. Day was just dawning and the church-bells had begun to ring. Soon all the children were also up, but there was still no tidings of the missing husband and father.

In the morning the chill blasts of winter entered their humble home, and on looking out they saw that the houses, fields, and roads were thickly covered with snow. The day was clear and cold, as if befitting the holy-day they were about to celebrate. They were able to see a long distance from the house, but no one was in sight.

Akulina was busy baking cakes, and had it not been for the joyous shouts of the children she would not have known that Polikey was coming up the road, for a few minutes later he came in with a bundle in his hand and walked quietly to his corner. Akulina noticed that he was very pale and that his face bore an expression of suffering—as if he would like to have cried but could not do so. But she did not stop to study it, but excitedly inquired: “What! Illitch, is everything all right with you?”

He slowly muttered something, but his wife could not understand what he said.

“What!” she cried out, “have you been to see our mistress?”

Polikey still sat on the bed in his corner, glaring wildly about him, and smiling bitterly. He did not reply for a long time, and Akulina again cried:

“Eh? Illitch! Why don’t you answer me? Why don’t you speak?”

Finally he said: “Akulina, I delivered the money to our mistress; and oh, how she thanked me!” Then he suddenly looked about him, with an anxious, startled air, and with a sad smile on his lips. Two things in the room seemed to engross the most of his attention: the baby in the cradle, and the rope which was attached to the ladder. Approaching the cradle, he began with his thin fingers quickly to untie the knot in the rope by which the two were connected. After untying it he stood for a few moments looking silently at the baby.

Akulina did not notice this proceeding, and with her cakes on the board went to place them in a corner.

Polikey quickly hid the rope beneath his coat, and again seated himself on the bed.

“What is it that troubles you, Illitch?” inquired Akulina. “You are not yourself.”

"I have not slept," he answered.

Suddenly a dark shadow crossed the window, and a minute later the girl Aksiutka quickly entered the room, exclaiming:

"The boyarinia commands you, Polikey Illitch, to come to her this moment!"

Polikey looked first at Akulina and then at the girl.

"This moment!" he cried. "What more is wanted?"

He spoke the last sentence so softly that Akulina became quieted in her mind, thinking that perhaps their mistress intended to reward her husband.

"Say that I will come immediately," he said.

But Polikey failed to follow the girl, and went instead to another place.

From the porch of his house there was a ladder reaching to the attic. Arriving at the foot of the ladder Polikey looked around him, and seeing no one about, he quickly ascended to the garret.

Meanwhile the girl had reached her mistress's house.

"What does it mean that Polikey does not come?" said the noblewoman impatiently. "Where can he be? Why does he not come at once?"

Aksiutka flew again to his house and demanded to see Polikey.

"He went a long time ago," answered Akulina, and looking around with an expression of fear on her face, she added, "He may have fallen asleep somewhere on the way."

About this time the joiner's wife, with hair unkempt and clothes bedraggled, went up to the loft to gather the linen which she had previously put there to dry. Suddenly a cry of horror was heard, and the woman, with her eyes closed, and crazed by fear, ran down the ladder like a cat.

"Illitch," she cried, "has hanged himself!"

Poor Akulina ran up the ladder before any of the people, who had gathered from the surrounding houses, could prevent her. With a loud shriek she fell back as if dead, and would surely have been killed had not one of the spectators succeeded in catching her in his arms.

Before dark the same day a peasant of the village, while returning from the town, found the envelope containing Polikey's money on the roadside, and soon after delivered it to the boyarinia.



## The Candle

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, That ye resist not evil.”

—ST. MATTHEW V. 38, 39.

It was in the time of serfdom—many years before Alexander II.'s liberation of the sixty million serfs in 1862. In those days the people were ruled by different kinds of lords. There were not a few who, remembering God, treated their slaves in a humane manner, and not as beasts of burden, while there were others who were seldom known to perform a kind or generous action; but the most barbarous and tyrannical of all were those former serfs who arose from the dirt and became princes.

It was this latter class who made life literally a burden to those who were unfortunate enough to come under their rule. Many of them had arisen from the ranks of peasantry to become superintendents of noblemen's estates.

The peasants were obliged to work for their master a certain number of days each week. There was plenty of land and water and the soil was rich and fertile, while the meadows and forests were sufficient to supply the needs of both the peasants and their lord.

There was a certain nobleman who had chosen a superintendent from the peasantry on one of his other estates. No sooner had the power to govern been vested in this newly-made official than he began to practice the most outrageous cruelties upon the

poor serfs who had been placed under his control. Although this man had a wife and two married daughters, and was making so much money that he could have lived happily without transgressing in any way against either God or man, yet he was filled with envy and jealousy and deeply sunk in sin.

Michael Simeonovitch began his persecutions by compelling the peasants to perform more days of service on the estate every week than the laws obliged them to work. He established a brick-yard, in which he forced the men and women to do excessive labor, selling the bricks for his own profit.

On one occasion the overworked serfs sent a delegation to Moscow to complain of their treatment to their lord, but they obtained no satisfaction. When the poor peasants returned disconsolate from the nobleman their superintendent determined to have revenge for their boldness in going above him for redress, and their life and that of their fellow-victims became worse than before.

It happened that among the serfs there were some very treacherous people who would falsely accuse their fellows of wrongdoing and sow seeds of discord among the peasantry, whereupon Michael would become greatly enraged, while his poor subjects began to live in fear of their lives. When the superintendent passed through the village the people would run and hide themselves as from a wild beast. Seeing thus the terror which he had struck to the hearts of the moujiks, Michael's treatment of them became still more vindictive, so that from over-work and ill-usage the lot of the poor serfs was indeed a hard one.

There was a time when it was possible for the peasants, when driven to despair, to devise means whereby they could rid themselves of an inhuman monster such as Simeonovitch, and so these unfortunate people began to consider whether something

could not be done to relieve them of their intolerable yoke. They would hold little meetings in secret places to bewail their misery and to confer with one another as to which would be the best way to act. Now and then the boldest of the gathering would rise and address his companions in this strain: "How much longer can we tolerate such a villain to rule over us? Let us make an end of it at once, for it were better for us to perish than to suffer. It is surely not a sin to kill such a devil in human form."

It happened once, before the Easter holidays, that one of these meetings was held in the woods, where Michael had sent the serfs to make a clearance for their master. At noon they assembled to eat their dinner and to hold a consultation. "Why can't we leave now?" said one. "Very soon we shall be reduced to nothing. Already we are almost worked to death — there being no rest, night or day, either for us or our poor women. If anything should be done in a way not exactly to please him he will find fault and perhaps flog some of us to death — as was the case with poor Simeon, whom he killed not long ago. Only recently Anisim was tortured in irons till he died. We certainly cannot stand this much longer." "Yes," said another, "what is the use of waiting? Let us act at once. Michael will be here this evening, and will be certain to abuse us shamefully. Let us, then, thrust him from his horse and with one blow of an axe give him what he deserves, and thus end our misery. We can then dig a big hole and bury him like a dog, and no one will know what became of him. Now let us come to an agreement — to stand together as one man and not to betray one another."

The last speaker was Vasili Minayeff, who, if possible, had more cause to complain of Michael's cruelty than any of his fellow-serfs. The superintendent was in the habit of flogging him severely every week, and he took also Vasili's wife to serve him

as cook.

Accordingly, during the evening that followed this meeting in the woods Michael arrived on the scene on horseback. He began at once to find fault with the manner in which the work had been done, and to complain because some lime-trees had been cut down.

"I told you not to cut down any lime-trees!" shouted the enraged superintendent. "Who did this thing? Tell me at once, or I shall flog every one of you!"

On investigation, a peasant named Sidor was pointed out as the guilty one, and his face was slapped. Michael also severely punished Vasili, because he had not done sufficient work, after which the master rode safely home.

In the evening the serfs again assembled, and poor Vasili said: "Oh, what kind of people are we, anyway? We are only sparrows, and not men at all! We agree to stand by each other, but as soon as the time for action comes we all run and hide. Once a lot of sparrows conspired against a hawk, but no sooner did the bird of prey appear than they sneaked off in the grass. Selecting one of the choicest sparrows, the hawk took it away to eat, after which the others came out crying, 'Twee-twee!' and found that one was missing. 'Who is killed?' they asked. 'Vanka! Well, he deserved it.' You, my friends, are acting in just the same manner. When Michael attacked Sidor you should have stood by your promise. Why didn't you arise, and with one stroke put an end to him and to our misery?"

The effect of this speech was to make the peasants more firm in their determination to kill their superintendent. The latter had already given orders that they should be ready to plough during the Easter holidays, and to sow the field with oats, whereupon the serfs became stricken with grief, and gathered in Vasili's

house to hold another indignation meeting. "If he has really forgotten God," they said, "and shall continue to commit such crimes against us, it is truly necessary that we should kill him. If not, let us perish, for it can make no difference to us now."

This despairing programme, however, met with considerable opposition from a peaceably-inclined man named Peter Mikhayeff. "Brethren," said he, "you are contemplating a grievous sin. Taking of human life is a very serious matter. Of course it is easy to end the mortal existence of a man, but what will become of the souls of those who commit the deed? If Michael continues to act toward us unjustly God will surely punish him. But, my friends, we must have patience."

This pacific utterance only served to intensify the anger of Vasili. Said he: "Peter is forever repeating the same old story, 'It is a sin to kill any one.' Certainly it is sinful to murder; but we should consider the kind of man we are dealing with. We all know it is wrong to kill a good man, but even God would take away the life of such a dog as he is. It is our duty, if we have any love for mankind, to shoot a dog that is mad. It is a sin to let him live. If, therefore, we are to suffer at all, let it be in the interests of the people—and they will thank us for it. If we remain quiet any longer a flogging will be our only reward. You are talking nonsense, Mikhayeff. Why don't you think of the sin we shall be committing if we work during the Easter holidays—for you will refuse to work then yourself?"

"Well, then," replied Peter, "if they shall send me to plough, I will go. But I shall not be going of my own free will, and God will know whose sin it is, and shall punish the offender accordingly. Yet we must not forget him. Brethren, I am not giving you my own views only. The law of God is not to return evil for evil; indeed, if you try in this way to stamp out wickedness it will



come upon you all the stronger. It is not difficult for you to kill the man, but his blood will surely stain your own soul. You may think you have killed a bad man—that you have gotten rid of evil—but you will soon find out that the seeds of still greater wickedness have been planted within you. If you yield to misfortune it will surely come to you.”

As Peter was not without sympathizers among the peasants, the poor serfs were consequently divided into two groups: the followers of Vasili and those who held the views of Mikhayeff.

On Easter Sunday no work was done. Toward the evening an elder came to the peasants from the nobleman’s court and said: “Our superintendent, Michael Simeonovitch, orders you to go to-morrow to plough the field for the oats.” Thus the official went through the village and directed the men to prepare for work the next day—some by the river and others by the roadway. The poor people were almost overcome with grief, many of them shedding tears, but none dared to disobey the orders of their master.

On the morning of Easter Monday, while the church bells were calling the inhabitants to religious services, and while every one else was about to enjoy a holiday, the unfortunate serfs started for the field to plough. Michael arose rather late and took a walk about the farm. The domestic servants were through with their work and had dressed themselves for the day, while Michael’s wife and their widowed daughter (who was visiting them, as was her custom on holidays) had been to church and returned. A steaming samovar awaited them, and they began to drink tea with Michael, who, after lighting his pipe, called the elder to him.

“Well,” said the superintendent, “have you ordered the moujiks to plough today?”



"Yes, sir, I did," was the reply.

"Have they all gone to the field?"

"Yes, sir; all of them. I directed them myself where to begin."

"That is all very well. You gave the orders, but are they ploughing? Go at once and see, and you may tell them that I shall be there after dinner. I shall expect to find one and a half acres done for every two ploughs, and the work must be well done; otherwise they shall be severely punished, notwithstanding the holiday."

"I hear, sir, and obey."

The elder started to go, but Michael called him back. After hesitating for some time, as if he felt very uneasy, he said:

"By the way, listen to what those scoundrels say about me. Doubtless some of them will curse me, and I want you to report the exact words. I know what villains they are. They don't find work at all pleasant. They would rather lie down all day and do nothing. They would like to eat and drink and make merry on holidays, but they forget that if the ploughing is not done it will soon be too late. So you go and listen to what is said, and tell it to me in detail. Go at once."

"I hear, sir, and obey."

Turning his back and mounting his horse, the elder was soon at the field where the serfs were hard at work.

It happened that Michael's wife, a very good-hearted woman, overheard the conversation which her husband had just been holding with the elder. Approaching him, she said:

"My good friend, Mishinka [diminutive of Michael], I beg of you to consider the importance and solemnity of this holy-day. Do not sin, for Christ's sake. Let the poor moujiks go home."

Michael laughed, but made no reply to his wife's humane request. Finally he said to her:

"You've not been whipped for a very long time, and now you have become bold enough to interfere in affairs that are not your own."

"Mishinka," she persisted, "I have had a frightful dream concerning you. You had better let the moujiks go."

"Yes," said he; "I perceive that you have gained so much flesh of late that you think you would not feel the whip. Look-out!"

Rudely thrusting his hot pipe against her cheek, Michael chased his wife from the room, after which he ordered his dinner. After eating a hearty meal consisting of cabbage-soup, roast pig, meat-cake, pastry with milk, jelly, sweet cakes, and vodki, he called his woman cook to him and ordered her to be seated and sing songs, Simeonovitch accompanying her on the guitar.

While the superintendent was thus enjoying himself to the fullest satisfaction in the musical society of his cook the elder returned, and, making a low bow to his superior, proceeded to give the desired information concerning the serfs.

"Well," asked Michael, "did they plough?"

"Yes," replied the elder; "they have accomplished about half the field."

"Is there no fault to be found?"

"Not that I could discover. The work seems to be well done. They are evidently afraid of you."

"How is the soil?"

"Very good. It appears to be quite soft."

"Well," said Simeonovitch, after a pause, "what did they say about me? Cursed me, I suppose?"

As the elder hesitated somewhat, Michael commanded him to speak and tell him the whole truth. "Tell me all," said he; "I want to know their exact words. If you tell me the truth I shall reward

you, but if you conceal anything from me you will be punished. See here, Catherine, pour out a glass of vodki to give him courage!"

After drinking to the health of his superior, the elder said to himself: "It is not my fault if they do not praise him. I shall tell him the truth." Then turning suddenly to the superintendent he said:

"They complain, Michael Simeonovitch! They complain bitterly."

"But what did they say?" demanded Michael. "Tell me!"

"Well, one thing they said was, 'He does not believe in God.'"

Michael laughed. "Who said that?" he asked.

"It seemed to be their unanimous opinion. 'He has been overcome by the Evil One,' they said."

"Very good," laughed the superintendent; "but tell me what each of them said. What did Vasili say?"

The elder did not wish to betray his people, but he had a certain grudge against Vasili, and he said:

"He cursed you more than did any of the others."

"But what did he say?"

"It is awful to repeat it, sir. Vasili said, 'He shall die like a dog, having no chance to repent!'"

"Oh, the villain!" exclaimed Michael. "He would kill me if he were not afraid. All right, Vasili; we shall have an accounting with you. And Tishka—he called me a dog, I suppose?"

"Well," said the elder, "they all spoke of you in anything but complimentary terms; but it is mean of me to repeat what they said."

"Mean or not you must tell me, I say!"

"Some of them declared that your back should be broken."

Simeonovitch appeared to enjoy this immensely, for he laughed

outright. "We shall see whose back will be the first to be broken," said he. "Was that Tishka's opinion? While I did not suppose they would say anything good about me. I did not expect such curses and threats. And Peter Mikhayeff—was that fool cursing me too?"

"No; he did not curse you at all. He appeared to be the only silent one among them. Mikhayeff is a very wise moujik, and he surprises me very much. At his actions all the other peasants seemed amazed."

"What did he do?"

"He did something remarkable. He was diligently ploughing, and as I approached him I heard some one singing very sweetly. Looking between the ploughshares, I observed a bright object shining."

"Well, what was it? Hurry up!"

"It was a small, five-kopeck wax candle, burning brightly, and the wind was unable to blow it out. Peter, wearing a new shirt, sang beautiful hymns as he ploughed, and no matter how he handled the implement the candle continued to burn. In my presence he fixed the plough, shaking it violently, but the bright little object between the colters remained undisturbed."

"And what did Mikhayeff say?"

"He said nothing—except when, on seeing me, he gave me the holy-day salutation, after which he went on his way singing and ploughing as before. I did not say anything to him, but, on approaching the other moujiks, I found that they were laughing and making sport of their silent companion. 'It is a great sin to plough on Easter Monday,' they said. 'You could not get absolution from your sin if you were to pray all your life.'"

"And did Mikhayeff make no reply?"

"He stood long enough to say: 'There should be peace on

earth and good-will to men,' after which he resumed his ploughing and singing, the candle burning even more brightly than before."

Simeonovitch had now ceased to ridicule, and, putting aside his guitar, his head dropped on his breast and he became lost in thought. Presently he ordered the elder and cook to depart, after which Michael went behind a screen and threw himself upon the bed. He was sighing and moaning, as if in great distress, when his wife came in and spoke kindly to him. He refused to listen to her, exclaiming:

"He has conquered me, and my end is near!"

"Mishinka," said the woman, "arise and go to the moujiks in the field. Let them go home, and everything will be all right. Heretofore you have run far greater risks without any fear, but now you appear to be very much alarmed."

"He has conquered me!" he repeated. "I am lost!"

"What do you mean?" demanded his wife, angrily. "If you will go and do as I tell you there will be no danger. Come, Mishinka," she added, tenderly; "I shall have the saddle-horse brought for you at once."

When the horse arrived the woman persuaded her husband to mount the animal, and to fulfil her request concerning the serfs. When he reached the village a woman opened the gate for him to enter, and as he did so the inhabitants, seeing the brutal superintendent whom everybody feared, ran to hide themselves in their houses, gardens, and other secluded places.

At length Michael reached the other gate, which he found closed also, and, being unable to open it himself while seated on his horse, he called loudly for assistance. As no one responded to his shouts he dismounted and opened the gate, but as he was about to remount, and had one foot in the stirrup, the horse

became frightened of some pigs and sprang suddenly to one side. The superintendent fell across the fence and a very sharp picket pierced his stomach, when Michael fell unconscious to the ground.

Toward the evening, when the serfs arrived at the village gate, their horses refused to enter. On looking around, the peasants discovered the dead body of their superintendent lying face downward in a pool of blood, where he had fallen from the fence. Peter Mikhayeff alone had sufficient courage to dismount and approach the prostrate form, his companions riding around the village and entering by way of the back yards. Peter closed the dead man's eyes, after which he put the body in a wagon and took it home.

When the nobleman learned of the fatal accident which had befallen his superintendent, and of the brutal treatment which he had meted out to those under him, he freed the serfs, exacting a small rent for the use of his land and the other agricultural opportunities.

And thus the peasants clearly understood that the power of God is manifested not in evil, but in goodness.





Maxim Gorky



## My Travelling Companion

### I

I met him in the harbour of Odessa. For three successive days my attention had been drawn by that low-slung, sturdy figure and by that eastern face framed in a handsome beard. Ever so often he would crop up before me: I would see him standing for hours on end at the granite pier, chewing on the head of his cane and gazing dully over the turgid waters of the harbour with his black, almond-shaped eyes: a dozen times a day he would stroll past me with the air of a man who has not a care in the world. Who was he?... I began to watch him. He, for his part, as though on purpose to whet my interest, began to crop up more and more often and, finally, I became accustomed to the sight of his fashionable, light check suit and black hat, his lazy step and dull, bored gaze and began to recognize him from far away. He was totally out of place here in the harbour amid the whistling of steamers and engines, the clanking of chains, the shouts of the dockers, the frantic, all-enveloping hustle of the port. All the people here were preoccupied, tired, all were bustling, begrimed, sweating shouting and swearing. And through all this busy clamour strolled that strange figure of a man with his dead-bored face—indifferent to everything, remote and withdrawn.

Finally, on the fourth day, I came across him during the lunch break and decided that, come what may, I must find out who he was. Settling down not far away from him with a loaf of bread

and a water-melon, I began to eat, watching him and wondering what would be the politest way of getting into conversation.

He stood leaning against a pile of tea packets and gazing idly round, fingering his cane as though it were a flute.

For me, dressed like a tramp and with a docker's strap on my back, all stained with coal dust, it was difficult to make the first approach to such a dandy. However, to my surprise, I saw that his eyes were fixed upon me and that they were now animated by an unpleasant, greedy, animal flame. I decided that the object of my curiosity was hungry and, taking a quick look round, I asked him quietly:

"Want something to eat?"

He started, avidly bared something like a hundred close-set, healthy teeth and, like me, glanced suspiciously about him.

No one was paying us any attention. I handed him half the water-melon and a piece of wheaten bread. He seized the lot and disappeared, squatting down behind a pile of crates. Sometimes his head would emerge briefly, the hat pushed back and showing his tanned, perspiring forehead. His face shone with a wide smile and, for some reason best known to himself, he kept winking at me, without for one second ceasing to chew. I made a sign that he should wait for me and went to get some meat, bought it, brought it back, gave it to him and stood by the crates in such a way as to hide him from the eyes of any passers-by. Until then he had kept peering round like a beast of prey at his kill, as though he were afraid someone might snatch it away from him; now he began to eat more calmly, yet still so hurriedly and avidly that it became painful for me to watch this desperately hungry man and I turned my back on him.

"I tank you! I tank you very much!" He shook me by the shoulder, then seized my hand, squeezed it and began to shake

it painfully.

In five minutes' time he was launched on his story.

A Georgian, Prince Shakro Ptadze, the only son of his father, a rich landlord from Kutaisi, he had been serving as a clerk on a station of the Transcaucasian railway and living with a friend. This friend had suddenly disappeared taking with him all Prince Shakro's money and valuables and so the prince had set out in pursuit. By chance, he heard that his friend had taken a ticket for Batumi; Prince Shakro followed him at once. In Batumi, however, it came to light that the friend had gone on to Odessa. Then Prince Shakro had approached a certain Vano Svanidze, a barber—also a friend, the same age as himself, but not answering to a similar physical description—borrowed his passport, and set off for Odessa. Here he informed the police of the theft, they promised to find the thief for him, he waited for two weeks, ate through all his money, and this was now the second day that he had not had a bite to eat.

I listened to his story, interspersed with curses, watched him, believed him, and felt sorry for the boy—he was rising twenty and so naïve that one might have given him still less. Frequently and with profound indignation he referred to the firm friendship which had bound him to the thief who had robbed him of things for which Shakro's stern father would doubtless "cut my throat" with a "dagga" if his son failed to retrieve them. I thought that, unless someone helped this lad, the avid city would suck him under. I knew what frequently trivial causes sometimes swelled the ranks of the down-and-out, and here Prince Shakro had every opportunity of entering that worthy but hardly respected social group. I wanted to help him. I suggested to Shakro that we should go to the Chief of Police and ask for a ticket, but he looked embarrassed and told me that he would not go. Why? It appeared



that he had not paid his landlord for the lodgings he had taken and when asked for the money had struck someone; since then he had been lying low and quite rightly presumed that the police would not thank him for his failure to pay the money or for the blow. Come to that, he could not remember for certain whether it was one blow, two, three or four that he had delivered.

This complicated the situation. I decided that I would keep on at my present job until I had earned enough money to send him back to Batumi, but—alas!—this promised to be too lengthy a process because it transpired that Shakro, having tasted hunger, now ate for three or more.

At that time, as a result of an influx of people from famine stricken regions, the daily wage at the harbour was low and between us, out of the eighty kopecks I earned, we spent sixty on food. In addition to this, before I met the prince I had decided to go on to the Crimea and had no desire to stay for long in Odessa. So I suggested to Prince Shakro that he and I should go together on foot under the following conditions: if I could not find him a travelling companion on to Tiflis I would accompany him myself but, if I did find someone, we would go our separate ways.

The prince looked at his smart shoes, his hat, his trousers, stroked his jacket, thought for a while, sighed repeatedly and, finally, gave his consent. So it came about that he and I set off together to walk from Odessa to Tiflis.

## II

By the time we got to Kherson I knew my travelling companion to be a naïve, wild youth, extremely unschooled, merry when he was full, miserable when he was hungry; knew him as a power-

ful, good-natured animal.

On the road he told me about the Caucasus, about the way of life of the Georgian landowners, of their entertainments and their attitude to the peasants. His tales were interesting, with a weird beauty all their own, but they left me with a most unflattering picture of the teller. He told me, for example, the following story:

A rich prince's neighbours had gathered at his home for a feast: they drank wine, ate *churek* and *shashlyk*, ate *lavash* bread and rice pilaff, and then the prince invited his guests to the stables. The horses were saddled. The prince took the best and set him galloping over the grass. It was a mettlesome stallion! The guests praised his noble bearing and speed, once more the prince put him into a gallop but, suddenly, a peasant on a white horse came thundering over the turf and passed the prince's horse—passed him and ... laughed proudly. The prince was put to shame before all his guests! ... His brows twitched sternly together, he summoned the peasant to him with a gesture and, when the man rode up to him, cut off his head with one blow of his sabre and killed his horse with a pistol shot through the ear, then went to the magistrate and informed them of what he had done. He was sentenced to penal servitude.

Shakro told me all this in a tone of sympathy for the prince. I tried to prove to him that in this case his sympathy was quite wasted, but he rather saw fit to enlighten me.

"Princes are few, peasants are many. No prince should be condemned for just one peasant. Vat it the peasant? Zat." Shakro showed me a clod of earth. "But za prince—za prince is like a star!"

We argued, he lost his temper. When he lost his temper he used to bare his teeth like a wolf and his whole face would

become sharp.

"Shut up, Maxim! Never 'ave you lived in za Caucasus!" he would shout at me.

My reasoned arguments were powerless against his spontaneity and what seemed clear as daylight to me simply made him laugh. Whenever I had him cornered by proofs of the superiority of my opinions he would not stop to reconsider but would say:

"You just go on to za Caucasus and try zere to live. You see—vat I say is right. Everyone acts zat vay, so it must be right. Vy should I be believing you if you alone say zat tings are not so and tousands of people—zat zey are so?"

Then I would give up the argument, realising that only facts, not words could convince a man who believes that life, whatever it be like, is always right and just. I would keep quiet and he, quite carried away, smacking his lips, would talk on about life in the Caucasus, full of wild beauty, full of fire and originality. These stories, while they interested and entertained me, would at the same time shock and infuriate me by their cruelty, by their reverence for riches and brute strength. Once, I happened to ask him if he knew the teaching of Christ.

"Of course!" he answered shrugging his shoulders.

On further examination, however, it transpired that what he knew was as follows: there had been a person called Christ who rose against the laws of the Jews, and for that the Jews had crucified him on a cross. But he was God and so he did not die on the cross but ascended into heaven and then gave people a new law of life.

"What kind of a law?" I asked.

He looked at me with mocking astonishment and asked: "You are Christian? Vell zen, I too am Christian. Almost everybody on Earth is Christian. Vell, zen, vy do you ask? You see how

everybody lives?—Zat is zee law of Christ.”

My blood was up and I began to tell him of the life of Christ. To begin with he listened with attention but this gradually slackened off and finally he yawned.

Seeing that his heart had no ears for me, I again addressed myself to his mind and began to talk to him of the advantages of mutual assistance, of the advantages of knowledge, of the advantages of keeping on the right side of the law, of advantages and nothing but advantages.... But my arguments shattered in fine dust against the stone wall of his understanding of life.

“Might zat is right! Za strong man is za law unto himself! 'Ee does not 'ave to study. 'ee finds 'is road blindfold!” Prince Shakro would argue lazily.

He always remained true to himself. That made me respect him, but he was barbarous, cruel and, every now and again, I felt a sudden surge of hatred for Shakro. However, I did not give up hope of finding some point of contact with him, some common ground on which we could meet and begin to understand one another.

We had traversed the Perekop Isthmus and were approaching Yaila. I was dreaming of the southern shore of the Crimea; the prince, chanting strange songs through his teeth, was cast down. We had got through all our money and so far there had been no opportunities to earn. We were aiming for Theodosia where, at that time, work was beginning on the construction of a harbour.

The prince informed me that he, too, intended to work and that, when we had earned enough money, we would go on by sea to Batumi. In Batumi he had many friends and he would immediately find me a job as a caretaker or watchman. He patted me on the shoulder and declared patronisingly with an anticipatory clicking of the tongue:

"Such a life I vill organise to you! Tcc, tcc! You vill drink vine—all you vant! Eat mutton—all you vant! Marry viz a Georgian voman, a fat Georgian voman, tcc, tcc, tcc!... She vill bake you *lavash*, bear you children, many children, tcc, tcc!"

That "tcc, tcc!" at first surprised, then began to irritate me, and finally reduced me to a state of miserable fury. In Russia this particular noise is used to call in the pigs; in the Caucasus, it serves as an expression of enthusiasm, regret, pleasure or sorrow.

Shakro's fashionable suit was already very well worn and his shoes were gaping in many places. His cane and his hat we had sold back in Kherson. In place of the hat he had bought himself the old cap of a railway employee.

The first time he had put it on his head—well to one side—he had asked me:

"'Ow I look? 'Andsome?"

### III

So here we were in the Crimea, Simferopol behind us and heading for Yalta.

I walked in dumb wonder at the natural beauty of this sea-girt corner of earth. The prince sighed grievously and, rolling his melancholy gaze over the surrounding countryside, tried to fill his empty stomach with doubtful berries. His acquaintanceship with their nutritive properties did not always work out happily for him, and often he would demand of me with angry humour:

"And if I turn inside out, 'ow'll I go on after zat? Eh? You tell me—'ow?"

No opportunity for earning anything whatever came our way and we, not having a kopeck to spend on bread, nourished ourselves on fruit and hopes for the future. Shakro was already

beginning to reproach me with laziness and “seeting gaping”, as he put it. He was growing generally wearisome but, most of all, he tormented me with tales of his own fabulous appetite. It appeared that, having broken his fast at midday with “a leetle lamb” and three bottles of wine, at two o’clock he could without any particular effort consume a dinner of three plates of some such outlandish concoction as *chokhokhbili* or *chikhirtma*, a bowl of pilaff, a *shampur*<sup>1</sup> of shashlyk, “unleemited kvantities of *tolma*” and many and various other Caucasian dishes with all of which he was used to take wine—“as much as I liked”. Day in, day out he would tell me of his gastronomical inclination and discoveries—smacking his lips, his eyes burning, baring his teeth, grinding them, noisily sucking down and swallowing the hungry saliva which sprayed abundantly from his eloquent lips.

Once, near Yalta, I got a job clearing an orchard of pruned branches and, having taken a day’s pay in advance, spent the whole half-ruble on bread and meat. When I came back with my purchases the gardener called me and I went off, leaving what I had bought with Shakro who had declined to work on the pretext of a headache. On my return an hour later I saw that Shakro had not been exaggerating in his tales about his appetite: not a crumb remained of all that I had bought. It was an uncomradely act, but I said nothing—which, as it transpired later, was my undoing.

Shakro, noting my silence, took advantage of it in his own way. This was the beginning of an absurd situation. I would work and he, having refused, on one pretext or another, whatever job was offered, would eat, sleep and goad me on to further efforts. I was half-amused, half-sorry for him—the great healthy

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<sup>1</sup> An iron rod on which the shashlyk is spitted and grilled.



tough—when he would rake me hungrily with his eyes, having awaited my return, weary after finishing whatever job I had undertaken, in some shady corner. What was still more sad and vexing was that he laughed at me for working. He could afford to laugh because he had learned to beg in the name of Christ. When he had first begun to collect alms he had been ashamed to do so in front of me but later, when we approached a Tatar village, he would begin his preparations for the collection before my very eyes. For this he hobbled along on a stick dragging one leg as though it were painning him, knowing that the canny Tatars would not open their purses to a healthy lad. I argued with him, trying to bring home to him the shame of such an occupation...

"I not know 'ow to work!" he refuted me briefly.

He did not collect much. At the same time, my own health began to fail somewhat. Our road became harder from day to day, and my relationship with Shakro more and more strained. He now insisted that I should feed him as though by right.

"You are my guide! Guide me! 'Ow is it possible I go so far on foot? I am not used. It may be I die of it. Vy you torment me, keel me? If I die, vat 'appens to all ze uzzers? My muvver, she cries, my farver, 'ee cries, my friends, zay all cry! 'Ow many tears?"

I listened to speeches like these but they did not anger me. At that time I had begun to nurse a strange thought which gave me patience to cope with it all. Sometimes he would sleep and I, looking searchingly into his calm, expressionless face, would repeat to myself, as though the words held some as yet imperfectly understood revelation for me: "My travelling companion ... mine... my travelling companion...."

And, somewhere in the dim recesses of mind, arose the thought that Shakro was indeed only insisting on his right when he made

such confident and bold demands on my help and care. In these demands there was force of character, there was power. He enslaved me and I submitted to him and studied him, watching every flicker of expression, trying to figure out where and at what point he would pull himself up in this process of establishing his dominion over another man. He, for his part, felt fine, sang, slept and laughed at me whenever the spirit moved him. Sometimes we would separate for two or three days; I would supply him with bread and money and tell him where he should wait for me. When we came together again he, having seen me off with suspicion and angry resentment, would welcome me joyously, triumphantly, and would always say, laughing:

“And I think you run away on your own, leave me all alone! Ha, ha, ha!”

I would give him some food, tell him about the beautiful places I had seen and once, speaking of Bakhchisarai, told him about Pushkin and recited from his poem. All this made no impression on him whatsoever.

“Oh, verses! Zat is songs, not verses! I knew a man once, a Georgian. ‘ee could sing songs! Zey vere real songs!... ‘Ee would begin to sing-ay, ay, ay!... Loud ... verry loud ‘ee sang! As if someone vere twisting a dagger about in ‘ees gullet!.. ‘Ee knifed inn-keeper. Gone Siberia now.”

Every time I returned to him I fell still lower in his estimation, and he could not conceal this from me.

Our affairs were going badly. I could hardly find opportunities to earn even one-and-a-half rubles a week and, of course, that was very far from sufficient for two. Shakro’s collections saved us nothing in our expenditure on food. His stomach was a small abyss which swallowed everything indiscriminately—grapes, melons, salt fish, bread, dried fruits—and as time went

by it seemed to become still more capacious and to require more and more victims.

Shakro began to hurry me to leave the Crimea, reasonably confronting me with the fact that it was already autumn and we still had far to go. I agreed with him. Besides, I had already seen all I wanted of that part of the Crimea, and so we went on towards Theodosia in the hopes of "raking in" some "cash", of which we were now quite devoid.

Having walked about twenty versts on from Alushta, we halted for the night. I had persuaded Shakro to walk along the coast, although it was a much longer route, but I wanted to breathe the sea air. We lit a fire and lay down beside it. It was a glorious evening. The dark green sea broke on the rocks down below us; the pale blue sky kept a solemn silence above, and all around the trees and bushes were rustling quietly. The moon was rising. Shadows fell from the lacy green of the plane-trees. A bird was singing boldly, melodiously. Its silver trills melted in the air alive with the gentle, caressing sound of the waves and, when they faded, the nervous chirping of some insect at once became audible. The fire blazed merrily and its flame seemed a great flaring bouquet of red and yellow flowers. These too, cast their own shadows and these shadows leapt around as merrily as though they were showing off their vivacity to the lazy shadows of the moon. The whole expanse of the sea's horizon was deserted, the sky above it cloudless, and I felt as though I were sitting on the edge of the earth contemplating empty space—that most enchanting of mysteries... A timorous feeling of being on the verge of something inexpressibly vast filled my soul, and my very heart beats were hushed in awe.

Suddenly, Shakro burst out into a loud guffaw:

"Ha, ha, ha... Vat a stoopid face you `ave on! Ex-actly like

zee sheep! Aha, ha ha!..."

I was as startled as though a clap of thunder had suddenly resounded right over my head. But it was worse than that. It was funny, yes, but—how it hurt my feelings! ... He, Shakro, was crying with laughter; I was on the verge of tears for quite a different reason. There was a great lump in my throat, I was speechless and could only stare at him with popping eyes which, of course, made him laugh all the more. He rolled about on the ground holding his stomach; I still could not get over the insult. I had suffered a very real injury and those few who, I hope, will understand what I was going through—because they themselves, perhaps, have experienced something of the same sort—will be able to perceive its full enormity.

"Stop it!" I yelled at him, furiously.

He jumped with fright but still could not pull himself together and paroxysms of laughter continued to overwhelm him, he puffed out his cheeks, his eyes bulging and then suddenly collapsed in a fresh bellow of laughter. Then I got up and walked away from him. I walked for a long time, without a thought in my head, almost without awareness of any kind, brimming with the burning poison of my injury. I had opened my heart to embrace the whole of Nature and silently, with all my soul, I had been telling Her how I loved Her with the ardent love of a man who has something of the poet in him, and Nature, in the person of Shakro, had burst out laughing at me for my moment of self-surrender! I would have gone far in compiling a deed of accusation against Nature, Shakro and life in general, had not swift steps sounded behind me.

"Be not angry!" Shakro pronounced shyly, gently touching my shoulder. "You vere saying prayers? I did not know."

He spoke in the timid tone of a guilty little boy and, in spite

of my emotional state, I could not help seeing his pathetic face, comically distorted by shame and fear.

"I vill never 'urt you again. Truly! Never!"

He shook his head vehemently.

"I see—you are 'umble. You work. Don't make me to work, I vonder—Vy? Must be—because 'ee's stoopid, like zee sheep."

So there he was comforting me! There was he apologizing to me! Of course, after such comfort and such apologies there was nothing left for me to do but to forgive him not only for the past, but for all that was yet to come.

Half an hour later he was already sound asleep and I was sitting beside him, looking at him. In sleep even a strong man appears weak and defenceless—Shakro was pitiable. The puffy lips and arched brows gave his face a childish look of shy surprise. He breathed evenly, calmly, but sometimes he would begin to toss and talk in his sleep, speaking rapidly on a note of entreaty in Georgian. Around us reigned that tense silence which invariably awakes a feeling of expectation and which, if it went on for long enough, would send a man crazy by the absolute quality of the stillness and the absence of all sound, that vivid shadow of movement. The quiet whispering of the waves did not reach us—we were in a kind of pit overgrown with clinging bushes and resembling the gaping ragged jaws of some petrified beast. I looked at Shakro and thought:

"He is my travelling companion ... I could leave him here, but I shall never get away from him, for his name is legion ... He is my travelling companion for all my life ... He will walk beside me to the edge of the grave ..."

Theodosia did not come up to our expectations. When we arrived, there were some four hundred others who, like us, had hoped to find work and who had had to be satisfied with the part



of spectators of the building of the pier. The workmen on the job were Turks, Greeks, Georgians, Russians from Smolensk and Ukrainians from Poltava. Everywhere in the town and its outskirts there wandered in groups the grey, depressed figures of the "famine-ridden", and tramps from the Crimea and the Sea of Azov moved amongst them with a wolf-like lope.

We went on to Kerch.

My travelling companion kept his word and gave up bating me: but he was very hungry and gnashed his teeth like a wolf when he saw anyone eating, and horrified me by his descriptions of the amount of various foods which he would gladly have swallowed. For some time now he had begun to recall women. First in passing—with sighs of regret, then more frequently, with the gloating smiles of "a man of zee East", and then, finally, had let himself go to such a degree that he could not let a single female pass by, whatever her age or appearance, without sharing with me some lascivious practical or philosophical comment on one or other of her points. He spoke of women so freely, with such knowledge of the subject, and looked at them from such an astonishingly single-minded point of view, that it made me feel like washing my mouth out ... Once I tried to prove to him that women were in no way his inferiors but, seeing that not only was he thoroughly offended at me for my opinions, but was ever prepared to lose his temper over the humiliation to which, in his view, I was subjecting him, I decided to leave off these attempts until he was better fed.

We headed for Kerch not round the coast but across the steppe in order to shorten the road, for we had nothing in our pack but one oat-cake weighing about three pounds which we had bought from a Tatar for our last five kopecks. Shakro's efforts to beg bread in the villages led to nothing. Everywhere people answered



briefly: "Can't feed you all!" This was nothing but the truth: in that difficult year there really were an appalling number of people searching for a bite of bread.

My travelling companion could not abide the famine refugees—rivals in the collection of alms. His vital reserves, in spite of the hard road and poor nourishment, would not permit of his acquiring such a drained and pathetic appearance about which they could boast as of a kind of perfection and, seeing them coming from afar, he would say:

"Again zey come! Phoo, phoo, phoo! Vy do zey come? Vy do zey travel about? Is zere in all Russia so little place? I do not understand! Verry stoopid people, zee Russians."

When I explained the causes which sent the stupid Russian people wandering across the Crimea in search of bread, he would shake his head unbelievably and reply:

"Don't understand! 'Ow eez it possible! ... In Georgia vee do not 'ave such foolishnesses!"

We arrived in Kerch late in the evening and had to spend the night on the shore under the scaffolding of the quay. It was better that we should remain in hiding. We knew that, not long before our arrival, all the superfluous inhabitants had been deported from Kerch and, as tramps, we were afraid of getting mixed up with the police; moreover, as Shakro was travelling on somebody else's passport, this could have led to serious complications in our careers.

The waves at high tide sprayed us generously with foam, at dawn we crept out from the scaffolding damp and chilled. All day we wandered about the wharves and all that we managed to earn was one small coin slipped me by a priest's wife for carrying a bag of melons from the market.

It was necessary to cross the bay to Taman! Not one boatman

would agree to take us across as oarsmen, however much I implored them to do so. All were prejudiced against the tramps who, not long before our arrival, had earned themselves all too great a reputation in these parts and, not without reason, they classed us among them.

When evening fell, angry at our lack of luck and at the world in general, I made up my mind to a somewhat risky undertaking and, with the onset of night, I proceeded to put it into execution.

#### IV

That night, Shakro and I quietly approached the customs post near which three sloops were moored by chains to iron rings screwed into the stone wall of the embankment. It was dark, there was a wind blowing, the sloops bumped against one another and the chains were clanking. It was easy for me to loosen one of the rings and pull it out of the stone.

Some ten feet above our head the excise sentry walked up and down whistling between his teeth. When he halted anywhere close to us I would stop working, but this was a superfluous precaution: he could not be expected to suspect the presence of a man below him sitting up to his neck in water. Besides, the chains kept up a continuous clanking without any help from me. Shakro was already stretched out in the bottom of the boat and whispering something at me, the sense of which I could not catch because of the noise of the waves. The ring gave way in my hands. A wave took the boat and carried it away from the bank. I held the chain and swam alongside it, then clambered on board. We took up two of the planks from the floor of the boat and, fixing them into the rollocks in place of oars, we rowed away ...

The waves were in a lively mood and Shakro, sitting at the

tiller, now disappeared from my gaze altogether, now rose high above me, and with a loud cry, almost came falling down on top of me. I advised him not to cry out if he did not want to be heard by the sentry. Then he fell silent. I saw his face as a white blur. He held the tiller all the way. We had no time to exchange places and we were frightened to move about in the boat. I called out to him what course to set and he, understanding what I wanted at once, did everything as deftly as a born sailor. The planks acting for oars were of little help to me. The wind was behind us and I did not pay any particular attention to where we were drifting but just tried to keep the prow pointing towards the opposite bank. It was easy to guess where this was because we could still see the lights of Kerch. The waves peered in at us over the sides of the boat and muttered angrily; the further we drifted out into the bay the higher they rose. In the distance there sounded the roaring of water, wild and full of menace ... And the boat drifted on—quicker and quicker. It was becoming very difficult to keep on course. Now we slithered down to the bottom of deep pits, now we were tossed up to the summit of great hills of water, and the night grew darker and darker, the clouds coming ever lower. The lights at our stern disappeared in the darkness and then things became really frightening. It seemed as though there were no limit to this expanse of angry water. There was nothing to be seen but the waves flying towards us out of the darkness. They knocked one plank out of my hand and I myself threw the other onto the floor of the boat and held onto the sides firmly with both hands. Shakro emitted a wild yell every time the boat leapt upwards. I felt weak and helpless in this darkness, surrounded by the wrathful element and deafened by its noise. Without hope, a prey to bitter despair, I saw nothing but those waves with their whitish crests breaking in salty spray, and the

clouds about me, dense, ragged, were themselves like waves ... I understood one thing only: everything that was going on around me was in potential immeasurably more furious and more terrible, and I was somehow offended that it seemed to be holding back and did not wish to show its full power. Death was inevitable. But it was essential that its impartial, all-levelling sway should be somehow aestheticised, made more acceptable—it was so coarsely matter-of-fact, so hard to accept. If I were given the choice between burning in flames or drowning in a quagmire, I should do my best to choose the former—it is somehow a more worthy ending.

“Let us 'oist a sail!” shouted Shakro.

“Where are you going to get a sail from?” I asked.

“Out of my coat ...”

“Throw it here! Don't let go the tiller! ...”

Shakro began a silent struggle in the bows.

“Old it!”

He threw me his coat. Crawling painfully along the bottom of the boat, I tore another plank from the floor, pushed it through the sleeve of the rough garment, propped it against the seat, braced my legs and had just caught hold of the other sleeve and a part of the hem when something quite unexpected happened ... The boat leapt particularly high, then shot downwards and I found myself in the water, holding the coat in one hand and grasping the rope looped round the outside of the boat with the other. The waves broke noisily over my head and I was swallowing the bitter, salt water. It had filled my ears, mouth, nose... Clinging firmly to the rope, I bobbed up and down in the water, bumping my head against the side of the boat and, flinging the coat back over the bottom of the overturned boat, struggled to heave myself back on after it. One of a dozen or so efforts was

successful, I straddled the boat and immediately caught sight of Shakro who was somersaulting about in the water, both hands grasping the very rope which I had just released. It appeared that it passed round the whole boat, threaded through the iron rings on the sides.

"Alive!" I shouted at him.

He jumped high out of the water and flopped down across the bottom of the boat. I reached out to help him up and for a moment we were face to face with one another. I was sitting astride the boat as though it were a horse, my feet thrust into the tow-ropes as into stirrups—but the pose was insecure: any wave might have knocked me out of the saddle. Shakro was gripping my knees with his hands and had buried his face in my chest. He was trembling from head to foot and I could hear his teeth chattering. Something had to be done. The bottom of the boat was as slippery as though it had been oiled. I told Shakro that he must lower himself back into the water, holding onto the rope on one side, and that I would do the same on the other. Instead of answering he began butting his head into my chest. Every now and again the wild dance of the waves would send them leaping over us and we could hardly maintain our hold; the rope was cutting terribly into one of my legs. Throughout my field of vision great hills of water were heaving into being and vanishing noisily.

I repeated what I had just said in the tone of an order. Shakro began to butt his head into my chest still more violently. There was no time to lose. I tore his hands loose from me one after the other and began to push him into the water, trying to make him catch the rope. And then something happened which frightened me more than anything else which had taken place that night.

"You want to drown me?" whispered Shakro, and looked into my face.



That really was terrifying! The question itself was terrifying, still more so the tone of the question in which there sounded a meek submission, and a plea for mercy, and the last sigh of a man who had lost all hope of escaping a fatal issue. But most terrifying of all were the eyes in the deathly-pale, wet face! ...

I yelled at him: "Hold on!" and lowered myself into the water, holding the rope. My leg struck against something and at first I could understand nothing for the pain of it. But then I did understand. Something hot surged up within me. I became intoxicated and felt myself strong as never before...

"Land!" I yelled.

Possibly great seafarers on the discovery of new lands shouted this word with more feeling than I, but I doubt that they shouted it any louder. Shakro let out a whoop and cast himself into the water. But soon we had both sobered: the water was still up to our chests and no more solid signs of dry land were anywhere to be seen. Fortunately, I had not let go of the boat. And so Shakro and I took up our positions one on each side of it and, holding onto the saving ropes, cautiously proceeded in an unknown direction, leading the boat behind us.

Shakro was muttering something and laughing. I was looking anxiously about me. It was pitch-dark. Behind and to the right of us the sound of the waves was louder, ahead and to the left—softer; we set off to the left. The bottom was firm, sandy, but full of sudden pitfalls; sometimes we could not touch bottom and had to paddle with our legs and one arm, holding onto the boat with the other; at others the water was only up to our knees. In the deep places Shakro howled and I trembled with fright. Then, suddenly—we were saved! Ahead of us a light was visible.

Shakro began to yell for all he was worth; but I very well remembered that the boat was state property and lost no time in



reminding him of this. He fell silent, but in a minute or two he began to sob. I could not comfort him—there was no comfort.

The water grew shallower ... up to the knees ... the ankles. Still we dragged the government boat; but there came a moment when we no longer had the strength and we let it go. A kind of black, withered tree trunk lay across our way. We jumped over it and both of us landed barefooted on some kind of prickly grass. It was painful and, on the part of the earth, scarcely hospitable, but we took no notice of that and set out at a run towards the light. It was about a mile away and, flaming merrily, seemed to be laughing as it moved towards us.

## V

...Three enormous, shaggy dogs, leaping out of somewhere in the darkness, flung themselves upon us. Shakro, who had been sobbing fitfully all the time, emitted a howl and fell flat upon the ground. I threw the wet coat at the oncoming dogs and bent down, feeling with my hand for a stone or a stick. There was nothing, only the grass pricked my hand. The dogs made a concerted attack. I whistled for all I was worth, thrusting two fingers into my mouth. They jumped back and immediately we heard the tramping feet and raised voices of running men.

A few minutes later we were at the fire in a circle of four shepherds clad in sheepskins, the wool outermost.

Two sat on the ground smoking, one, a tall man with a thick black beard in a tall fur hat such as are worn by Cossacks, stood behind us leaning on a staff with an enormous knot of root at the end; the fourth, a sandy-headed youngster, was helping the weeping Shakro to undress. About five yards outside the circle the earth was covered by a thick layer of something grey and

billowy, resembling spring snow which has just begun to thaw. Only after looking carefully for some time was it possible to distinguish the separate forms of sheep, closely huddled together. There must have been several thousand there, compressed by sleep and the darkness of the night into a dense, warm, thick strata of the steppe. From time to time they would bleat, plaintively and nervously....

I dried the coat and told the shepherds everything as it had really happened, and told them also how I had come by the boat.

"Where is it, that boat?" asked the stern grey-headed old man, who had never taken his eyes off me as I spoke.

I told him.

"Go, Mikhail. Take a look!"

Mikhail—the one with the black beard, shouldered his staff and set out for the shore.

Shakro, trembling with cold, asked me to give him the warm but still wet coat, but the old man said:

"Wait! Run about a little first to warm your blood. Run round the fire, up with you!"

Shakro did not immediately understand but then he suddenly jumped up and, naked, began to dance a wild dance, flying like a ball over the fire, twirling around on one spot, stamping his legs on the ground, yelling at the top of his voice, waving his arms. It was a killing sight. Two of the shepherds were rolling about on the ground, laughing for all they were worth, while the old man, his face unmoved and serious, tried to clap out the rhythm of the dance but could not catch it and, his eyes glued to Shakro's gyrations, kept shaking his head, twitching his moustache and crying out in a deep bass voice:

"Hai-ha! So-so! Hai-ha! Butz-butz!"

Illumined by the light of the fire, Shakro writhed like a snake.

now hopping on one foot, now tapping rhythmically with both, and his body, gleaming in the light of the fire, covered with great drops of sweat which appeared red as blood.

Now all three shepherds were clapping and I, trembling with cold, was drying myself at the fire and thinking that today's adventure should have been sheer joy for a lover of Fenimore Cooper or Jules Verne: shipwreck, hospitable aborigines and barbarous dancing around a camp-fire ....

Now Shakro was already sitting on the ground huddled up in his coat and eating something, glancing up at me with black eyes which held a sparkle I did not quite like. His clothing was drying out hung on sticks thrust into the earth close to the fire. I was also given some bread and salted lard.

Mikhail returned and sat down beside the old man without a word.

"Well?" asked the old man.

"The boat's there!" answered Mikhail briefly.

"It won't wash away?"

"No!"

And they all fell silent, staring at me.

"Well," asked Mikhail, not addressing anybody in particular, "should we take them to the Ataman<sup>2</sup> in the village? Or maybe—straight to the excisemen?"

No one answered. Shakro ate unconcernedly.

"We could take them to the Ataman ... or to the excisemen for that matter ... One's as good as t'other ..."

"Wait a bit, granddad..." I began.

But he took absolutely no notice of me.

---

2 Cossak headman; administrator of a village in time of peace, commanding officer when service is required of the semi-regular Cossak levies.

"So that's the way it is! Mikhail! The boat's there?"

"Uhu, it's there..."

"So—and the water won't wash it away?"

"No, it won't."

"Then, let it stay there and tomorrow the boatmen'll go over to Kerch an' they can take it with them. Why shouldn't they take an empty boat along with them? Eh? So that's that... and now you ... you raggety lads ... did you ... how should I put it, now?... Did you get a fright, the pair of you? No? Tee-hee!... But another half-a-verst and you'd 've been out in the open sea. What'd you've done then, if you'd 'a been thrown out into the sea? Ah? You'd 've gone to the bottom, like stones, the both of you. Drowned you'd 've been! And no more to it."

The old man fell silent and looked at me with a sarcastic smile lurking in his moustaches.

"Well, nothing to say for yourself, laddie?"

I was fed up with his deliberations, the drift of which I had failed to grasp and had taken as a form of mockery.

"I'm listening to you!" I said, somewhat edgily.

"Well, and what do you make of it?" the old man wanted to know.

"Neither head nor tail."

"Now then, now then, what're you showing yer teeth for? Think it's all in order to snap and snarl at yer elders and betters, do you?"

I said nothing.

"Don't you want any more to eat, now?" continued the old man.

"No."

"Well, don't then. Nobody's forcing you, but perhaps you might take a bit of bread for the road, like?"

I started with joy but did not give myself away.

"For the road, I might..." I said calmly.

"They! Give 'em some bread for the road and some of that there lard. And maybe there's something else there, too? If there is, let them have it..."

"Are we letting 'em go then?" asked Mikhail.

The other two raised their eyes to the old man.

"Well, and what'd they find to do here with us?"

"But we thought we might take them to the Ataman ... or if not—to the excisemen," remarked Mikhail in a disappointed voice.

Shakro stirred in his place near the fire and inquisitively poked his head from out of the coat. He was undismayed.

"What'd they find to do with the Ataman? There's nothing there for them, as I reckon. They can go and see him later ... If they want."

"What about the boat then?" insisted Mikhail.

"The boat?" The old man batted question for question. "What about the boat? Is it there?"

"It is," replied Mikhail.

"Well, let it stay there, then. And in the morning Ivashka can take it to the moorings. And from there someone'll take it over to Kerch. There's nothing else we *can* do with the boat."

I watched the old shepherd intently and could not detect the least movement in his phlegmatic, sunburnt and weathered face, over which the shadows of the fire were leaping.

"As long as no ill comes of it unexpected-like later on..." Mikhail began to give way.

"If you don't let your tongues run away with you, I don't see why ill should come of it. And if we take them to the Ataman, it's my opinion that it'll mean trouble for us and them. What we want's to attend to our own business and what they want is—to

walk. Eh! Have you far left to walk?" asked the old man, although I had already told him how far.

"To Tiflis..."

"A long road! There you see, and the Ataman'll delay them; and if he delays them, when'll they arrive? Better let 'em keep going to where they want go get to. Ah?"

"Why not, then? Let 'em go on!" The old man's comrades agreed when, having concluded his slow remarks, he tightly compressed his lips and looked round at them all questioningly, fingering his grey-black beard.

"Well, God go with you, lads!" The old man made a gesture of dismissal. "And the boat we'll send back where it belongs. All right?"

"Thank you, grandfather!" I took off my cap.

• "What are you thanking me for?"

"Thank you, brother, thank you!" I repeated, very moved.

"What are you thanking me for? Here's a queer thing! I say—God go with you, and he says—thank you! You weren't afraid I'd send you to the devil, were you? Eh?"

"Guilty—I was!" I admitted.

"Oh!..." And the old man raised his brows. "Now why should I send a man on that bad road? Better send him the way I'd rather be treading myself. Who knows... we may meet again, and then ... we'll be old acquaintances, like. We all need a bit of help at one time or another... 'Bye, now!..."

He pulled off his shaggy sheepskin cap and bowed to us. His comrades bowed too. We asked them the way to Anapa and set out.

Shakro was laughing at something...



## VI

"What are you laughing at?" I asked him.

I was delighted with the old shepherd and his philosophy of life, I was delighted with the fresh wind blowing up before the dawn straight into our faces and because the sky was cloudless, because soon the sun would rise in a clear sky and the brilliant, handsome god of a new day would be born....

Shakro winked at me cunningly and burst out laughing even louder. I smiled, too, hearing his healthy, merry laughter. All that was left of our exhausting journey after two or three hours at the shepherds' fire and the tasty bread and lard was a slight aching in our bones; but this sensation did not mar our good spirits.

"Well, what are you laughing at? Glad to have come out of it alive, are you? Alive, and with a full stomach into the bargain?"

Shakro shook his head, nudged me vigorously with his elbow, pulled a face, burst out laughing again and eventually spoke out in his execrable Russian:

"You not understand, vy it is funny? No? I vill tell you! You know vat I do if zey 'ad taken us to zat Ataman-exciseman? You don' know? I tell on you: 'ee wanted to drown me! And I begin to cry. Zen zey are sorry for me and do not put me in prison! Understand?"

To begin with I wanted to take this as a joke—but—alas!—he was able to persuade me that his intention had been perfectly serious. He persuaded me of this so clearly and convincingly that, instead of losing my temper with him for his naïve cynicism, I was filled with a feeling of profound pity for him. What else is it possible to feel for a man who, with the brightest of smiles and in the most sincere tones, informs you of his intention

to kill you? What was there to be done about him, if he looked on this act as an endearing witty joke?

I hotly began to prove to Shakro all the immorality of his intention. He replied very simply that I do not understand his true interests and forget that he is living with a false passport and that for that no one was going to pat him on the back...

Suddenly, I was struck by a cruel thought...

"Wait a moment," I said, "do you mean to say you believe that I really did want to drown you?"

"No!... Ven you push me into ze vatter, zen I believe, ven you vent in yourself—I stopped."

"Thank God for that!" I cried out. "Well, I suppose I must say thank you!"

"No, do not say tank you! I say you tank you. Back there, at ze fire, you were cold, I was cold too. Ze coat was yours—but you did not take eet. You dried eet, gave eet me. And for yourself—you took nutting. So I say tank you! You are very good man—I understand. Ven vee come to Tiflis—you vill be paid back for everything. I vill take you to my farver. Say to my farver—'ere is ze man! Give 'im to eat, give 'im to drink, and me—to zee donkeys in zeir stables! Zat is vat I shall say! You will leeve with us, you vill be a gardener, vill drink vine, eat all you vant!... Akh, akh, akh!... A vonderful life you vill 'ave! Very simple!... Eat from ze same dish, I vill say, drink from ze same cup as I!..."

He launched into a long and detailed description of the delights of the life he intended to arrange for me in Tiflis. And to the sound of his talking I thought of the great misery of those people who, armed by a new morality, by new aspirations, have outstripped their contemporaries and are forced to travel in the company of those who are alien to them, incapable of under-

standing them... Life is hard for these lonely people! They are above the earth, in the air... But they hover there like seeds of good corn, however seldom they may fall in fruitful soil....

It was growing light. Near the horizon, the sea was already sparkling with pinkish gold.

"I vant sleep!" said Shakro.

We halted. He lay down in a hollow formed by the wind in the dry sand near the shore and, covering himself from head to heels in the big coat, soon went to sleep. I sat beside him and watched the sea.

It was living a life of its own, full and free, animated by powerful movement. Herd upon herd of waves rolled noisily up onto the shore and broke over the sand which hissed quietly as it absorbed the water. Tossing their white manes, the leading waves flung themselves noisily in a frontal attack along the shore and slithered back defeated, only to be met by others, coming up in support. Locked in a firm embrace, all foaming and frothing, they rolled up the shore again and beat upon it in an effort to extend the borders of their being. From the horizon to the shore, over all the expanse of the sea, rose these strong and supple waves and kept rolling in, on and on, massed together and bound one to another by a common purpose.... The sun illumined their crests more and more brightly and those of the distant waves on the horizon appeared blood-red. Not one drop was wasted or lost without trace in the titanic movement of massed water which seemed as though animated by a conscious purpose which it was on the point of achieving by these wide and rhythmical blows. It was fascinating to watch the challenging courage of the leaders dashing themselves bravely against the silent shore, and it was grand to watch how, calmly and solidly behind them, followed the whole sea, the mighty sea, already dyed by the sun in

all the colours of the rainbow and fully aware of its own beauty and strength...

Cutting through the waves, a great steamer sailed out from behind the promontory, rocking stately on the heaving bosom of the sea, riding the crests of the great waves which flung themselves angrily against its sides. Beautiful and powerful, its metal shining in the sun, it might at any other time have called to mind the proud works of man who can impose his will upon the elements.... But at my side lay sleeping a man who was himself the element.

## VII

We walked on through the Terek district. Shakro was torn and ragged to an almost unbelievable degree and was awfully ill-tempered, even though he no longer went hungry as there were now plenty of opportunities for earning. He had shown himself to be quite unadapted for any form of work. Once he did try forking the straw discarded by the threshing machine but he laid off at midday, having rubbed bleeding blisters on the palms of his hands. Another time we tried weeding and he grazed the skin off his neck with a hoe.

Our progress was fairly slow—two days working to one day on the road. Shakro ate without any self-control and, because of his greed, I could not save enough money to buy him so much as a part of a new outfit of clothing, whereas all the remaining parts were a countless mass of variegated holes held together by ill-stitched, multicoloured patches.

Once, in some village or other, he found and removed from my pack five rubles which, with great difficulty and in secret from him, I had managed to save, and appeared that evening in

the house where I was working in the kitchen garden, drunk and in the company of a fat Cossack woman who hailed me with the greeting:

“Good on you, damned heretic!”

And when, startled by this appellation, I asked her why I was to be accounted a heretic, she replied with aplomb:

“Because, you devil you, you forbid the poor lad to make love to women! How can you forbid what the law allows? Anathema, that’s what you are!...”

Shakro stood beside her and nodded agreement. He was very drunk, and the least movement set him rocking as though he were coming unscrewed at the joints. His lower lip was pendulous. His dull eyes seemed to be trying to outstare me with empty persistence.

“Now then, you, what are you gaping at us like that for? Hand over his money!” shouted the woman, very daringly.

“What money?” I asked, amazed.

“Come on, come on! Or I’ll have you to the courthouse. Hand over that hundred and fifty rubles you took from him in Odessa!”

What was I to do? That damned woman in her drunken state might well have gone to the courthouse and then the village administration, hard on all kinds of vagrants, would have arrested us. Who knows what the consequences of such an arrest might have been for me and Shakro! So I began to use diplomatic means to get round the woman, which did not cost me any great effort. Somehow or other, with the help of three bottles of wine, I managed to placate her. She collapsed on the ground amongst the water-melons and went to sleep. I put Shakro to bed and early in the morning of the following day he and I quit the village, leaving the woman amongst the water-melons.

Half sick from the hangover, his face all crushed and swollen,



Shakro kept on spitting and heaving great sighs. I tried to talk to him but he did not answer and only shook his shaggy head like a sheep.

We were following a narrow footpath along which little red snakes were crawling back and forth, slithering about under our feet. The stillness which reigned all around was conducive to drowsy day-dreaming. Black flocks of clouds were moving slowly up the sky behind us. Merging together they covered the whole of the sky behind us when before us all was clear, although tatters of clouds had torn away from the main body and were blowing merrily on ahead, overtaking us. Somewhere in the distance there was a grumble of thunder and its growling roars were coming nearer and nearer. Drops of rain were falling. The grass was rustling like tin-foil.

There was no shelter. It was dark now and the rustle of the grass sounded louder, more fearful. There was a clap of thunder—and the clouds shuddered, flaming with blue light. Heavy rain came streaming down, and one after another the claps of thunder kept up a perpetual roaring over the deserted steppe. The grass, bent by gusts of wind and rain, lay flat along the earth. Everything was trembling, nervously aware. The lightning tore the clouds in blinding flashes.... In its brilliant, but light loomed a distant range of mountains, glittering with blue flames, silver and cold, then, when the lightning went out, it disappeared as though swallowed up by the abyss of the dark. All around was a roaring, trembling, echoing womb of sounds. It was as though the sky, turgid and angry, was undergoing a process of purification by fire from all the dust and filth emanating from the earth, and the earth, it seemed, was trembling in fear of its wrath.

Shakro was whimpering like a frightened dog. As for me, I was seized with a kind of gaiety, swept up above the everyday



world by the contemplation of this mighty, somber panorama of a storm over the steppe. Divine chaos carried me away and induced a heroic mood, enveloping the soul in stormy harmony....

I was overcome by the desire to participate in the storm, to find some outlet for the overflowing awe and wonder touched off in me by its power. The blue fire which had set the whole sky aflame, was, it seemed, alight in my own breast: and—well, how was I to express my vast excitement and my rapture? I began to sing—loudly, with all my might. The thunder roared, the lightning flashed, the grass rustled and I sang and felt myself utterly at one with all the other sounds... I was beside myself; it cannot be held against me, for I was doing no harm to anyone but myself. Storm at sea, thunder over the steppe! I know no more grandiose manifestations of nature.

And so I shouted aloud, in the firm conviction that I would not be disturbing anyone by such conduct and that I was running no risk of having my actions subjected to criticism. Suddenly, however, my legs were jerked sharply from under me and, involuntarily, I sat down in a puddle....

Shakro was looking into my face with serious and angry eyes.

"You are out of your senses? You are not? No? Zen—shu-ut up! Not to screech! I tear your throat open! Understand?"

I was amazed and began by asking him in what way I had disturbed him.

"You frighten me! Understand? Ze tunder—zat it God speaking, an' you shout 'im down.... Vat you tink?"

I told him that I had a perfect right to sing if I wanted to just as he had.

"But I do not vant," he declared categorically.

"Then don't!" I conceded.

"And you don't neither!" Shakro exhorted me severely.

"No, I feel like singing...."

"Now listen—vat you tink?" Shakro began on a note of fury. "'Oo are you? 'Ave you any relations? Land? 'Oo are you in zis vorld? You are a man, you tink? It is I—zee man! I 'ave every-thing!" He slapped his chest. "I am prince! And you... you—are nutting! Nutting at all! I am known in Kutaisi, in Tiflis!.... Understand? You no go against me! You serve me?—You vill be content! I pay you ten times over! You do zis for me? You cannot do any uzzer; you say yourself zat God commanded to serve all men without revard! I revard you! Vy-for do you torment me? Preach at me, frighten me? You vant, I become like you? Zat is not good! Ugh, ugh, ugh!... Tphoe! tphoe!..."

He talked, smacked his lips, spat, snorted, sighed... I looked into his face, my mouth open with astonishment. He was evidently pouring forth all the accumulated outrages, injuries and humiliations he had suffered at my hands since the beginning of our journey. To lend weight to his arguments, he kept poking his finger into my chest and shaking me by the shoulder and, at particularly powerful moments, pressed his whole great carcass down on me. The rain poured down upon us, incessant peals of thunder broke over our heads and Shakro, in order to make himself heard, was shouting at the top of his voice.

The absurdity of my position was what struck me most and made me burst out laughing to split my sides...

Shakro, spitting expressively, turned away from me.

## VIII

The nearer we came to Tiflis, the more thoughtful and gloomy did Shakro become. Something new appeared in his emaciated but still impassive face. Not far from Vladikavkaz we came to a

Circassian village and hired ourselves out there to harvest sweet-corn.

After two days working with the Circassians who hardly spoke any Russian and spent their time laughing at us and cursing us in their own language, we decided to leave the village, unnerved by the increasingly hostile attitude of its inhabitants. Some ten versts on from the village, Shakro suddenly pulled out from under his shirt a length of Lezghin chiffon and showed it to me in triumph, announcing:

“No more need to work! Vee sell—buy all vee need! It will take us until Tiflis! Understand?”

Graded to the point of fury, I snatched the material from him and threw it aside, glancing over my shoulder. Circassians are not to be trifled with. Not long before we had heard the following story from some Cossacks: one tramp on leaving the village where he had been working, had taken with him an iron spoon. The Circassians overtook him, found the spoon and, slitting open his stomach with a dagger, pushed the spoon deep into the wound and then rode calmly off leaving him out in the steppe where the Cossacks picked him up as a dying man. He told them the story and died on the way to their village. The Cossacks had warned us sternly against the Circassians more than once, telling us other stories which painted a similar moral—and I saw no reason to disbelieve them.

I reminded Shakro of this. He stood before me listening and suddenly, without a word, baring his teeth and narrowing his eyes, he sprang at me like a cat. For about five minutes we had a thorough free for all, till finally Shakro shouted angrily:

“Enough!”

Exhausted, we sat opposite one another in silence for some time. Shakro looked wistfully in the direction that I had thrown

the stolen chifon and launched into speech:

"Vy vee fight? Pa, pa, pa!... Very stoopid. Did I steal from you? You sorry to see I 'ave ze cloth? I sorry for you, zat is vy I steal.... You are ze one 'oo must work, I am not able.... Vat am I to do? I wanted to 'elp you...."

I tried to explain to him the meaning of theft.

"Please, shu-ut up! You 'ave 'ead like the wood...." He was contemptuous of me and explained: "If you are dying—vill you steal zen? Vell! And do you call zis life? Shut up!"

Afraid of angering him again, I said nothing. This was the second case of theft. Before, when we had been on the Black Sea, he had taken some pocket scales from a Greek fisherman. Then, too, we had almost come to blows.

"Vell—vee go on?" he asked, when we had calmed down, made things up and rested.

We went on. With every passing day his mood grew blacker and he looked at me strangely from under knitted brows. Once, when we had already crossed the Daryal ravine and were descending the Gudaur, he began:

"In a day or two—vee come to Teeflees. Tcc, tcc!" He clicked his tongue and beamed expansively. "I come 'ome: ver 'ave you been? I 'ave been travelling! I go to zee steam bath ... aha! I vill eat much ... ah, much! I say to my muvver—I much vant to eat! I vill say to my farver—forgive me! I 'ave seen much sorrow, I 'ave seen life—all kinds! Tramps are very good people. Eef I meet one, I give 'im a ruble, take 'im to zee inn, say drink vine. I 'ave been a tramp! I vill tell my farver... Zat man—'ee vas as an elder bruvver to me....' Ee beat me, ze dog!...'Ee feed me. Now, I vill say, you feed 'im for zat. Feed 'im for a year! For a year—as long as zat. You 'ear, Maxim?"

I liked to listen when he spoke in this way; in such moments

there was something simple, childlike about him. Such speeches were also of interest to me because I knew no one in Tiflis and winter was setting in—on the Gudaurl we had already met with snow. To some extent, I was counting on Shakro.

We walked quickly. We came to Mtskheta, the ancient capital of Iberia. The following day we planned to reach Tiflis.

From afar, about five versts distant, I set eyes upon the capital of Caucasia, wedged between two mountains. The end of the road! I was happy about something, Shakro—indifferent. With dull eyes he looked out ahead and spat hungry saliva, every now and again clasp ing at his stomach with a grimace of pain. He had risked eating raw carrot pulled by the wayside.

"You sink zat I—a Georgian nobleman—vill enter my city in daylight so, all ragged, dirty? Oh, no, no!—Vee wait until evening. 'Alt!'"

We sat down by the wall of some empty building and, each rolling a last cigarette, shivering with cold, began to smoke. A bitter, strong wind was blowing down from the Georgian Military Highway. Shakro sat humming a sad song. I thought of a warm room and of all the other advantages of a settled life over a vagrant existence.

"We go!" Shakro rose with the face of one who has made up his mind.

Darkness was falling. It was lighting-up time in the town. It was beautiful: gradually, one after another, the lights shone out in the gloom which had filled the valley and hidden the town.

"'Ere, you give me zat *bashlyk*<sup>3</sup> to 'ide my face, or so I may perhaps be recognized by friends."

---

3 A hood.

I gave him the *bashlyk*. We were walking along Olginskaya Street. Shakro was whistling a decisive tune.

"Maxim! See zat tram-stop—Veriysky Bridge? You sit zere, wait! Please, wait, I call in vun house, ask a friend about my people, farver, muvver..."

"You'll not be long?"

"Strait away! Vun moment!"

He slipped swiftly into the mouth of a dark and narrow alley, down which he disappeared—forever.

Never again was I to meet this man—the travelling companion of nearly four months of my life, but I often remember him with affection and real amusement.

He taught me much which is not to be found in thick folios written by the wise—for the wisdom of life is always more profound and all embracing than the wisdom of men.

1894



## The Reader

It was night when I left the house where I had been reading a recently published story of mine to a gathering of close acquaintances. Their praise had been lavish and I walked down the deserted street, feeling that never before had I experienced such joy in being alive.

The February night was clear and the cloudless star-studded sky breathed an invigorating cold on the earth in its splendid regalia of fresh fallen snow. The branches hanging over the fences cast quaintly patterned shadows in my path and snowflakes sparkled joyfully in the caressing blue radiance of the moonlight. There was not a living soul to be seen and the crunch of the snow underfoot was the only sound that broke the stillness of that serene and, for me, memorable night.

Yes, it's good to be something in the world, to stand out among one's fellow creatures, I thought.

And my imagination spared no bright colours in painting a picture of my future....

"Yes, your little piece was quite delightful, I would grant you that," said a thoughtful voice behind me.

I gave a start and looked round.

A little man dressed in black overtook me and fell into step at my side, looking up into my face with a sharp smile. Everything about him was sharp: his glance, his cheekbones, his chin with its tapering imperial; his whole trim figure had an eye-pricking angularity. He moved lightly and soundlessly, as if gliding over the snow. I had not seen him in the room where I had

been reading and was understandably surprised by his remark. Who was he? Where had he sprung from?

"Were you ... were you there too?" I asked.

"Yes, I had that pleasure."

He spoke in a tenor voice. His lips were thin and the small black moustache did not conceal their smile. The persistence of that smile created an unpleasant impression. I felt it implied some caustic idea that would prove unflattering to me. But I was in too good a mood to spend much time observing this aspect of my new companion, and the impression dissolved like a shadow in the glow of my own self-satisfaction. I walked along with him, wondering what he would say and secretly hoping that he would add to the number of pleasurable moments I had experienced that evening. Man is greedy because fortune smiles kindly upon him too seldom.

"It is good to feel that one is something out-of-the-ordinary, is it not?" my companion asked.

I noticed nothing to take exception to in this remark and hastened to agree with him.

"Tee-hee-hee!" he gave brittle laugh, nervously rubbing his small hands with their thin, tenacious fingers.

"You are a cheerful person." I remarked drily, stung by his laughter.

"Yes, I am a cheerful person," he affirmed, smiling and cocking his head on one side. "And I am also very inquisitive... I always want to know things—to know everything. It's a perpetual urge with me, it's what keeps me going. And the thing I want to know is—how much does your success cost you?"

I looked at him and replied reluctantly.

"About a month's work ... a little more perhaps."

"Aha!" he responded with alacrity. "A little toil, a little expe-

rience of everyday life, which is always worth something.... Still, it's not such a high price to pay for your awareness that at this very moment several thousand people are living your thoughts, reading your work. And after that come hopes that perhaps, in the course of time ...ha—ha! And when you are dead ... ha-ha-ha!... For all that you would be willing to give a little more, a little more than you have given us already. Is that not so?"

He broke out again into his stinging, pellet-like laughter, surveying me slyly with his sharp, black eyes. I surveyed him too, looking down on him, and asked coldly, offendedly,

"Excuse me .... With whom have I the pleasure of talking?"

"Who am I? Haven't you guessed? Well, just for the moment I won't say who I am. Surely it isn't more important for you to know a person's name than what he has to tell you?"

"Of course, not.... But this is all very strange," I replied.

For some reason he touched my coatsleeve and, still chuckling quietly, said, "Well, let it seem strange. Why shouldn't a man allow himself occasionally to venture beyond the bounds of common experience? ... And if you have no objections, let us speak frankly! Imagine that I am a reader—a strange reader, let us say, a reader who is very curious and would like to know just why and how books are written—your books, for example? Let's discuss that."

"Oh, by all means," I said. "I shall be delighted .... It's not every day that one has the chance of such meetings and conversations...." But I was lying. In reality I was beginning to find the whole thing unpleasant. What did the fellow want? Why should I allow this casual encounter with a perfect stranger to become a kind of debate?

All the same I walked along slowly at his side, trying to assume an expression of polite attention. As I recall, I had some

difficulty in doing so, but as I still had an ample reserve of high spirits and did not want to offend the man by refusing to talk to him, I decided to keep myself under control.

The moon was behind us and our shadows lay in our path. They had merged into a single dark patch that crawled ahead of us on the snow and as I looked at them, I felt something begin to grow inside me that, like these shadows, was dark, elusive and, like them, also ahead of me.

My companion was silent for a minute, then spoke in the confident tone of a man who is master of his thoughts.

"There is nothing more important and fascinating in life than the motives of human behaviour .... Is that not so?"

I nodded.

"You agree! .... Then let us discuss things frankly—never miss the chance of a frank discussion while you are still young!"

What a strange person, I thought, and with sudden interest I asked, smiling wryly. "But what shall we discuss?"

He looked hard at me for a moment, then exclaimed with a familiarity one would expect only from an old acquaintance, "We shall discuss the aims of literature!"

"Yes, but—isn't it rather late?"

"Too late! No—it is not yet too late for you!"

These words brought me up short. He had uttered them with such earnest assurance, and they sounded metaphorical, I halted with a feeling that I wanted to ask him something but he took my arm and led me on with gentle persistence.

"Don't stop. You're on a good road with me.... Well, we've had enough introduction! Tell me, what does literature want? ... You serve it, so you ought to know."

My astonishment was growing to the detriment of my self-control. What did this man want of me? Who was he?

"Now listen," I said, "you must agree that all this...."

"Is taking place for a perfectly good reason, believe me! Nothing in the world happens without some good reason for its happening.... So let us proceed a little faster, not forward, but deeper."

This crank was certainly interesting, but he annoyed me. I made another impatient move to walk on; he followed me, speaking calmly.

"I quite understand. You find it difficult at the moment to give any definition of the aim that literature pursues. I will attempt such a definition myself."

He drew a deep breath, then looked into my face with a smile.

"You will agree with me if I say that the aim of literature is to help man to understand himself, to enhance his belief in himself and develop his desire to seek truth; to fight meanness and pettiness in people, to bring out the good, to awaken in their hearts the sense of shame, anger and courage, to do everything to make people nobly strong and capable of endowing their lives with the sacred spirit of beauty. That's my formula; it is, of course, only a bare outline.... Fill it in with everything that can inspire life and tell me—do you agree with this definition?"

"Yes, you are right..." I said. "Near enough anyway. It is generally accepted that the task of literature is to ennoble mankind."

"Then what a great cause you serve!" the man said impressively—and gave another of his caustic laughs.

"But why are you saying all this?" I asked, pretending to be unaffected by his laughter.

"Why do you think?"

"To be quite frank...." I began, trying vainly to think of some cutting remark. What did being frank mean? This man was no

fool, he must know how restricted were the frontiers of human frankness and how sternly they were guarded by self-respect. When I looked again at my companion I felt deeply wounded by his smile—it carried so much irony and contempt! I felt the beginnings of fear, a fear that urged me to escape at once.

“Good night,” I said curtly, raising my hat.

“Why?” he exclaimed softly.

“I don’t like jokes that are taken to excess.”

“And you are going away?.... Well, it’s your own affair. But remember that if you go now we shall never meet again.”

He stressed the word “never” and it rang in my ears like the stroke of a funeral bell. I have always hated that word and feared it. It is like something heavy and cold, like a huge hammer specially designed by fate for demolishing human hopes. It was this word that stopped me.

“What is it you want?” I asked with misery and hatred.

“Let’s sit down,” he said, laughing once again and, taking my arm firmly, he pulled me down.

At that moment we were in the municipal gardens, on a path overhung with the motionless, icy branches of locust and lilac bushes. They hung over me scintillating in the moonlight and I felt as if these rigid branches, encrusted with ice and frost, were piercing my chest, thrusting deep into my heart.

Astonished and puzzled by my companion’s behaviour, I stared at him in silence.

There must be something wrong with him, I thought, trying to offer myself a comforting explanation of the man’s behaviour. But he seemed to divine my thought.

“You think I am abnormal? Drop all that. It’s such a cheap and obnoxious idea! How often under such pretexts do we refuse to understand somebody simply because he is more original than



ourselves, and how persistently does this idea perpetuate and accentuate the deplorable superficiality of our relationships with one another!"

"Yes, indeed...." I said, feeling more and more embarrassed in the presence of this man. "But, if you will excuse me, I must go.... My time is up."

"Go then," he said with a shrug. "Go... but remember that you hasten only to lose your true identity." He let go of my arm and I walked away.

I left him in the park on a hill over the Volga, a hill sheathed in snow and criss-crossed by the dark ribbons of footpaths. Before him lay a broad view of the silent dreary plain beyond the river. He sat down on one of the benches and stared into the remote distance and I walked away down the path, already feeling that I would not get away from him and yet still walking. Should I walk slow or fast, to show the man how little he meant to me?

I heard him begin to whistle some familiar tune.... It was that sad and humorous little song about the blind man leading the blind. Why should he choose that particular song, I thought.

And then I realised that from the moment I had met this little man I had been enclosed in a dark circle of strange and totally unexpected sensations. My recent serene and complacent frame of mind had been invaded by a sense of foreboding.

*But how can you the leader be  
Along a road you cannot see?*

I recalled the words of the song the man was whistling.

I turned round and looked back. With one elbow on his knee and his chin resting in his hand, he was watching me and whistling. The moon was shining on his face and I could see his black

moustache twitching. Moved by a feeling that something of great portent was at hand, I decided to go back. I strode up to him, sat down beside him and said calmly but with real eagerness, "All right, let's talk in simple terms...."

"Simplicity is something we all need," he nodded.

"I feel you possess some power to influence me and you obviously have something you wish to tell me.... Is that so?"

"At last you have found the courage to listen!" he exclaimed with a laugh: but now his laughter was more gentle and there seemed to be something like a ripple of joy in it.

"Well, tell me then!" I went on. "And without any of your oddities, if you can..."

"Very good! But you must agree that these oddities were needed to draw your attention. Modern life has blunted our interest in what is clear and simple; it is too hard and cold for us and we have lost the ability to warm and soften anything because we are cold and hard ourselves. We, it seems, are again in need of visions, fantasies, dreams and oddities. The life we have created lacks colour, it is dull and insipid! The reality that we were once so eager to make anew has crushed and annihilated us.... What are we to do? Well, let us try. Perhaps the power of invention and imagination will help man to rise above the earth for a while and once again discern the place in it which he had lost. For it is lost, is it not? Man is no longer lord of the earth. He has become a slave of life; by bowing down before facts he has lost the pride that he once took in his primacy. Is that not so? From facts that he himself has created he draws a conclusion and calls it an irrefutable law! And in his obedience to this law he fails to notice that he has blocked his path towards free creativity, restricted himself in the struggle for the right to destroy in order to create. He is not even struggling any more; he merely adapts....

What has he to struggle for? Where are the ideals for which he would perform deeds of valour? That is why life is so mean and dull, that is why man's creative spirit has flagged... Some seek blindly for that which would lend the mind wings and restore man's faith in himself. Often they go not towards that place wherein lies all that is eternal, that unites humanity, where God dwells.... Those who lose their way in search of truth will perish! Let them perish, let us not hinder them, or pity them—there are plenty of people in the world! What matters is the urge, the desire to find God, and if there are souls possessed of the desire to find God, He will be with them and give them life, because He is the eternal striving for perfection.... Is that not so?"

"Yes," I said, "that is so."

"You are certainly good at agreeing" my companion observed with another sarcastic laugh, and then fell silent, gazing into the distance. His pause was too long for me and I sighed impatiently. And then with his eyes still lost in the distance and not looking at me, he asked, "Who is your God?"

Until he put this question he had been speaking quietly and affectionately, and I had found it pleasant to listen to him; like all thinking people he was a little sad and this had brought him close to me. I felt that I understood him and my embarrassment had begun to evaporate. And now suddenly he posed this crucial question which any man of our time, if he is honest with himself, finds it so difficult to answer. Who was my God? If only I knew that!

I was defeated by this question. Who wouldn't have been? Who else in my position would have preserved his presence of mind? He looked at me with his sharp eyes, smiled and waited for my answer.

"You are silent too long for a man who has any capacity to

answer. Perhaps you will be able to tell me something if I put the question this way: you are a writer and thousands of people read you: what message are you trying to impart? And have you ever considered whether you have any right to teach?"

Never had I been forced to look so closely into the inner workings of my mind. Let no one think that I am exalting or humiliating myself in order to attract attention—it is no use asking a beggar for alms. I discovered in myself a fair measure of kind feelings and desires, a fair measure of what is usually called good, but what I could not find in myself was the feeling that would unite all this, the clear and well-shaped thought that would encompass all the phenomena of life. In my soul there was much hatred: it was constantly smouldering there and sometimes burst out in the clear flame of anger: but my soul harboured even more doubts. Sometimes they were such a burden to mind and heart that I languished in a state of total inner exhaustion... Nothing could bring me back to life, my heart was as cold as a dead man's, my mind slept, my imagination was haunted by nightmares. And in this state, blind deaf and dumb, I lived for days and nights on end, desiring nothing and understanding nothing: at such times I felt like a corpse that for some strange reason had not been buried. The horror of such an existence was intensified by awareness of the need to live for in death there was even less meaning and even more obscurity.... It probably took away even the luxury of hating.

Then what, in fact, was my message? What did I claim to teach? I as I really was. And what had I to say to people? The things people had been told long ago, that they had always been told? Things that induced people to listen but made them no better? But what right had I to teach these ideas and concepts if I, who was brought up on them, often acted contrary to their

command? And if I could act thus was my belief in them a sincere belief, firmly implanted in the foundations of my own true "self"? What could I tell this man who was sitting beside me? But he had grown tired of waiting for my answer and was talking again.

"I should not put these questions to you if I could not see that ambition has not yet destroyed your honour. You have the courage to listen to me.... From this I conclude that your self-love is rational because you do not shrink even from the torture of fortifying it. For that I will relieve the agony of your confrontation with me and speak to you as to one who has erred, but not as to a criminal.

"At one time there lived among us great men of letters, subtle observers of life and the human soul, people inspired with an implacable urge to perfect life, inspired with a deep faith in man. They wrote books that will never be consigned to oblivion because they contain eternal truths, and beauty everlasting shines from their pages. Their images are alive, animated by the power of inspiration. In these books there is both courage and a blazing anger; they ring with sincere and unforced love, and there is not a single superfluous word in them. It was these books, I know, that nourished your soul... But even so, I must assume, your soul remained poorly nourished because what you write about truth and love sounds false and pretentious, as though you were forcing yourself to say it. You are like the moon, you shine with a reflected light; and your light is pitifully dull, it proliferates shadows and its feeble radiance warms no one. You are too poor to give people anything of true value, and what you do give you give not for the supreme delight of enriching life with the beauty of thought and word, but rather for the purpose of elevating the accidental fact of your existence to the status of a phenomenon



necessary to man. You give in order to take more from life and people. You are too poor to make presents, you are a mere money-lender: you give a fraction of your experience on interest that has to be paid in attention to your own self. Your pen barely scratches at reality, it cautiously stirs the trivia of life and in describing the commonplace feelings of commonplace people you may, perhaps, also reveal to them many inferior truths. But can you create for them even a small illusion that elevates the soul?... No! You are confident that it is useful to dig in the rubbish of the commonplace and find in it nothing more than sad little truths which prove only that man is evil by nature, obtuse and dishonest, that he always and in every way depends on a mass of external circumstances, that he is impotent and wretched and isolated in his loneliness? And by this time, you know, he has probably become convinced of this! Because his soul is indifferent and his mind is dull.... And what else could it be! He looks at the way he is portrayed in books which—particularly if they are written with the skill that is so often mistaken for talent—always have rather a hypnotic effect. A person sees himself as you portray him and, having been shown how bad he is, cannot see any possibility of becoming better. Can you show him that possibility? Can you achieve that, when you yourself ... but I will spare you because while listening to me you have, I feel, not been thinking of how to justify yourself and refute what I have said. A teacher, if he is honest, must always be an attentive pupil. All you teachers of today, take far more from people than you give them because you keep talking only of what is lacking, which is all you see. But man must also have his merits: surely you have some yourselves? And you, how do you differ from the ordinary, commonplace folk that you portray so ruthlessly and meticulously, considering yourselves teachers, denouncers of vice for the sake of



the triumph of virtue? But have you noticed that the vices and the virtues—thanks to your attempts to define them—have only become more entangled, like two balls of thread, white and black, which in their proximity have rubbed off some of their original colour on each other and become grey? No, you are no God-sent creatures.... He would have chosen someone stronger than you. He would have infused their hearts with a passionate love of life, of truth, of people, that they might blaze in our darkness as luminaries of his power and glory.... But you burn smokily like the torches of Satan's triumph, and your fumes have eaten into people's minds and souls and are poisoning them with the venom of self-distrust. So tell me: what do you preach?"

I felt the man's hot breath on my cheek and kept my eyes averted for fear of meeting his glance. His words were burning into my brain like drops of fire and I was in agony.... I realised with horror how difficult it was to answer his simple questions. And I made no reply.

"So I, the zealous reader of all that you and others like you have written, ask: for what purpose do you write? And you write a lot.... Do you wish to awaken kindly feelings in people's hearts? No, you will never do that with cold and impotent words! And not only can you not give life anything new; you present even the old in a twisted, crumpled, shapeless form. When reading you, we learn nothing and are ashamed of nothing, except of you. It is all commonplace—commonplace people, commonplace thoughts, events.... When will someone speak of the troubled soul of man and the need for its regeneration? Where is the call to create? Where are the lessons in courage? Where are the words of hope that uplift the soul?

"You may retort that life provides no other images than those that you reproduce. But say it not, because it is a shame and

disgrace for a man who has the good fortune to possess the gift of words to confess himself impotent in the face of life and incapable of rising above it. And if you stand only on the same level as life, if you cannot by the force of your imagination create forms that life does not as yet possess but that are needed for its instruction, what is the use of your work and how can you justify your calling? Consider what harm you may do people by cluttering their minds with the rubbish of photographs of their uneventful lives. For you must acknowledge yourselves incapable of portraying things so that your picture of life would evoke a vengeful shame and an ardent desire to create other forms of existence.... Can you quicken the pulse of life? Can you inspire it with energy as others have done?"

My strange companion paused for a moment and I pondered his words in silence.

"I see around me many intelligent people but few among them of noble mind, and those who possess such feelings are broken and sick at heart. And I always notice that for some reason the better a man is, the purer and more honest his soul, the less energy he has, and the more painful and difficult it is for him to live. The lot of such people is loneliness and grief. No matter how much they yearn for something better, they have no strength to create it. Are they not so crushed and pitiful because they have not been given the timely help of an uplifting word?"

"And what is more," my strange companion continued, "can you evoke a joyous laughter that cleanses the soul? Look around you! People have forgotten how to laugh well! They laugh bitterly, they laugh with malice, they often laugh through tears, but never among them do you hear a joyful, sincere laughter, the laughter that should often come from grown men because good laughter restores the soul to health.... A man must be able to

laugh because laughter is one of the few advantages he has over the animals. Can you evoke in people any laughter other than the laughter of censure, the mean-spirited laughter at you, man, who is only funny because he is wretched? Try to understand that your right to teach must have sufficient grounds in your ability to awaken sincere feelings, feelings with the drive and power to destroy some forms of life in order to create other, freer forms in their stead. Anger, hatred, courage, shame, revulsion or a fierce desperation—these are the levers with which everything on earth can be destroyed. Can you create such levers? Can you set them in motion? In order to have the right to speak to the people, you must have in your heart either a great hatred of their shortcomings or a great love for them in their sufferings; if there are no such feelings in your heart, be modest enough to think again before you say anything...”

Day was breaking but in my soul there was an ever growing darkness. And the man for whom it held no secrets went on talking. Sometimes the thought struck me, “Is he human?”

But I was so engrossed in what he was saying that I had no time to ponder upon this riddle before his words struck again like needles into my brain.

“All the same life is becoming richer, reaching out to new frontiers, striking deeper, although the process is slow because we have neither the strength nor the skill to accelerate it. Yes, life is growing richer and every day people are learning to ask questions. Who is going to provide the answers? It ought to be you, you self-appointed apostles. But do you understand life well enough to explain it to others? Do you understand the demands of our age? Have you the ability to perceive what the future holds? And what can you say to awaken the person who has been corrupted by the squalor of life, who is broken and dispirited?”

Man is dispirited, he has little interest in life, his desire to live with dignity is almost used up. He wants to live simply, like a pig and—do you hear?—he laughs arrogantly when confronted with the word ‘ideal’: man is turning into a heap of bones covered with flesh and a thick skin, and this vile heap is moved not by the spirit but by lust. He needs attention. Make haste! Help him to live while he is still a human being! But what can you do to awaken his desire to live when you only moan, groan and sigh, or with cold indifference describe his disintegration? Life reeks of decay; hearts are saturated with cowardice and servility; minds and hands are bound with the soft bonds of sloth.... What can you inject into this chaos of corruption? How petty, how wretched you are? And how many there are of you! Oh, if only there would appear a stern and loving man with a blazing heart and a powerful all-embracing mind! The stifling atmosphere of shameful silence would resound with portentous words, ringing out like bell notes, and then perhaps the contemptible souls of the living dead would be shaken into action....”

After these words he fell into a long silence. I did not look at him. I cannot remember now which I felt more—shame or horror.

“What have you to say to me?” came the impartial question.

“Nothing!” I replied.

And again there was silence.

“Then how will you live now?”

“I don’t know!” I answered.

“What will you say?”

I held my peace.

“There is no wisdom higher than silence!”

The pause between these words and the laughter that followed was agonising. He laughed with the delight of a man who

for a long time had not had the opportunity to laugh so light-heartedly and pleasantly. But that accursed laughter made my heart bleed.

“Ha, ha! And you are supposed to be one of life’s teachers? You whom it is so easy to reduce to confusion? Ha, ha, ha.... And every one of you, young men who were born old, would be equally confused if he consented to have anything to do with me. Only he who has clad himself in the armour of lies, arrogance and shamelessness can remain unmoved before the judgement of his conscience. So that’s how strong you are—a single push and you fall! Say something, tell me something to justify yourself; refute what I have said! Relieve your heart of shame and remorse. Show some strength and confidence in yourself, if only for a minute, and I will take back the words I have thrown in your face. I will bow before you.... Show me that there is something in your heart that would help me to acknowledge you as a teacher! I need a teacher because I am a human being; I have lost my way in life’s darkness and I am seeking a way out to the light, to the truth, to beauty, to a new life—show me the way! I am a human being. Hate me, beat me, but drag me out of the slime of my indifference to life! I want to be better than I am; how can that be done? Teach me how!”

I thought: Can I, can I satisfy the demands that this man quite rightfully makes of me? Life is petering out, people’s minds are infested by an increasing horde of doubts and a way out must be found. Where is it? The only thing I know is that happiness is not the thing one must strive for. Why strive for happiness? The meaning of life does not lie there and man will never be satisfied by complacence; at least he is above that. The meaning of life lies in the beauty and strength of achievement, and every moment of our existence must have its lofty goal. That would be



possible, but not within the old boundaries of life, which are so narrow for everyone and within which there is no freedom for the human spirit....

He was laughing again, but softly now; it was the laughter of a man whose heart was being eaten into by thoughts.

"How many people have lived on earth, and yet how few have left anything for us to remember them by! Why is this so? Still, let us renounce the past—it excites too much envy. At the present time there is no one who could leave any trace on earth after his death. Man is lost in slumber.... And no one seeks to waken him. He sleeps and turns into an animal. The whip is what he needs and the fiery caress of love after the laying on of the lash. Don't be afraid of hurting him; if you strike with love he will understand your blow and take it as what he deserves. And when he is writhing with agony and shame of himself, you must lavish ardent caresses upon him and he will be reborn.... People? They are still children, although at times they astonish us with the wickedness of their deeds and the pervertedness of their thoughts. And they are always in need of love, of constant efforts to provide them with fresh and wholesome food for their souls.... Can you love people?"

"Love people?" I repeated doubtfully, for truly I did not know whether I did love them. And now I had to be sincere —no, I did not know. Who could say of himself: I love people. Any man who observed himself keenly would think hard before answering yes to that question. We all know how far from each of us are our own kith and kin.

"You are silent? But I understand you, even though you have nothing to say.... And now I shall leave you."

"Already?" I asked quietly because, afraid though I was of him, I was even more afraid of myself.



“Yes, I shall leave you now.... But I shall come again and not once. Wait!”

And he left.

How did he leave? I did not see him. He disappeared quickly and soundlessly, like a shadow.... I remained sitting on the park bench for a long time, heedless of the cold and of the fact that the sun had risen and was shining brightly on the icy branches of the trees. It was strange for me to see this clear day and the sun shining indifferently as usual, and this old tormented earth in its blanket of snow glittering unbearably bright in the sun's rays.

*1898*

## The Creepy-Crawlies

One hot summer's night, in a lonely street on the outskirts of the town, I witnessed a strange scene: a woman was standing in the middle of a large puddle, stamping her feet and splashing the mud about the way children do—stamping and singing a dirty song in a snuffling voice.

A violent thunderstorm had swept over the town during the day and the downpour had soaked the clayey mud in the street; the puddle was a deep one, and the woman's legs sank into it almost up to the knees. Judging by the sound of her voice, the singer was drunk. If, tired out with dancing, she fell in the mud, she could easily drown in it.

Pulling up the tops of my highboots, I waded into the puddle, took the dancer by the arms and dragged her to dry ground. For a moment she must have been frightened, because she followed me submissively, but then she wrenched her right arm free with a twist of her whole body, hit me in the chest and yelled. "Help!"

The next minute she was back in the puddle, dragging me in with her.

"To hell with you!" she muttered. "I won't go! I'll live without you... you try and live without me... help!"

A night-watchman emerged from the darkness, stopped within five paces of us and said gruffly:

"What's the row about?"

I told him that I was afraid the woman might drown in the mud and that I was trying to get her out. The watchman took a closer look at the drunken woman, spat loudly and commanded:

"Mashka, come on out!"

"I don't want to."

"Come out, I tell you!"

"I won't."

"D'you want me to give you a good hiding, damn yer?" the watchman said mildly, then turned to me, adding good-naturedly and chattily: "She's a local woman, a tow-picker, Mashka Frolikha. Got a fag?"

We lit up. The woman stamped about in the puddle, shouting:

"Bosses! I'm my own boss. If I want to I'll take a dip."

"I'll dip you one below your back!" the watchman warned—he was a bearded sturdy old man. "She kicks up a row like this every blessed night. And at home she has a legless son."

"Does she live far from here?"

"She ought to be killed," the watchman said, leaving my question unanswered.

"Someone ought to take her home," I suggested.

The watchman snorted into his beard, peered into my face in the light of his cigarette and walked off, tramping heavily through the mud.

"Take her! But have a good look at her mug first."

The woman sat down in the mud, and began threshing her arms about in it, screeching in a hideous snuffling voice:

*Like rowing...in the sea ....*

From the black chasm of the sky a big star was reflected in the dirty greasy water. When ripples covered the puddle the reflection disappeared. I waded into the puddle again, grasped the singer under the armpits, lifted her, and, pushing her along with my knees, carried her out to the fence. She resisted, waved her arms about and challenged me:

"Hit me, come on, hit me! Who cares! Oh, you beast.... oh,

you rotter. Come on, hit me!"

I leaned her up against the fence and asked where she lived. She raised her drunken head and looked at me with dark bleary eyes. I saw the sunken bridge of her nose, the remainder of which stuck out and upward like a button; her upper lip, twisted up by a scar, bared a row of small teeth, and her small plump face leered at me:

"All right, come along," she said.

We started off, bumping against the fence. The wet hem of the skirt whipped my legs.

"Come along, dearie," she said hoarsely, seeming to grow sober. "I'll be nice to you. I'll give you comfort."

She brought me to a large two-storied house standing in a yard. Gingerly, like a blind woman, she threaded her way between carts, barrels, packing cases and wood piles scattered in the yard, and stopped in front of a hole in the foundation.

"Go down," she said.

Leaning against the slimy wall with my arm round the woman's waist to hold up the lurching body, I descended the slippery steps. Gropingly I found the felt covering and the bolt of the door, opened it and stopped on the threshold of the black hole, hesitating to go further.

"Mummy, is that you?" a low voice came out of the darkness.

"It's me."

The smell of warm rot mingled with that of pitch hit me in the face. A match was struck and in its tiny glow I caught a momentary glimpse of a child's pale face.

"Who else could it be? It's me," the woman repeated leaning her whole weight against me.

Another match was struck, there was a tinkle of glass, and a skinny funny hand lighted a small tin oil lamp.

"My precious," the woman said, swaying, and slumped down in a corner. There, barely rising above the brick floor, a wide shakedown had been prepared.

Tending the flame of the lamp, the child turned down the wick, which had flared and begun to smoke. His face was grave, sharp-nosed, with bunched lips like a girl's—a face painted with a fine brush and strikingly incongruous in this dark damp hole. Having fixed the light he glanced at me with shaggy-looking eyes and said, "She's drunk?"

His mother lay across the bed, making sobbing, snoring noises.

"She ought to be undressed," I said.

"Then undress her," the boy answered, lowering his eyes.

When I started pulling off the woman's wet skirts, he enquired in a low matter-of-fact voice:

"Shall I put the lamp out?"

"What for?"

He did not answer. While I was busy with his mother, handling her as I would a sack of meal, I watched him. He was sitting in a packing case on the floor, under the window. The case was made of thick boards and bore the inscription in black printed letters:

***HANDLE WITH CARE***

***N.R. & Co.***

The sill of the square window was on a level with the boy's shoulder. Along the wall were several rows of narrow shelves with stacks of cigarette boxes and match boxes on them. Next to the case in which the boy sat was another case covered with yellow packing paper, which apparently did service as a table. His pitiful arms clasped at the back of his neck, the boy was looking up at the dark windowpanes.

Having undressed the woman, I tossed her wet clothes on the

stove, then I washed my hands in a corner out of an earthenware wash-stand, and said to the child as I wiped them on my handkerchief:

"Well, good-bye!"

He looked at me and said with a slight lisp:

"Shall I put the lamp out now?"

"Just as you like."

"Are you going away, aren't you going to lie down?" He pointed a skinny arm at his mother. "With her."

"What for?" I said blankly.

"You know yourself," he said with shocking simplicity, then added: "They all do."

Disconcerted, I looked around. On my right was the jutting ugly stove, on the hearth dirty dishes, in a corner, behind the packing case, pieces of tarred rope, a heap of oakum, billets of woods, chips and a yoke.

Stretched at my feet was the yellow snoring body.

"May I sit with you a bit?" I asked the boy.

He gave me a sullen look and said:

"She won't wake up till the morning, you know."

"Oh, I don't need her."

I squatted down beside his packing case and told him how I had met his mother. I tried to speak in a jocular tone:

"She sat down in the mud and started rowing, like she was using oars, and singing...."

He nodded, smiling a wan little smile the while he scratched his narrow chest.

"That's because she's drunk. She larks about even when she's sober. Just like a little girl...."

I could now see his eyes clearly—they really were shaggy, with surprisingly long eyelashes, and little hairs grew thickly on



his eyelids too. Bluish shadows lay under his eyes, accentuating the pallor of his skin, and his high forehead with a crease over the bridge of his nose was crowned with a shock of curly reddish hair. The expression of his eyes, attentive, calm, was indescribable. It was all I could do to sustain their strange, unearthly look.

"What's wrong with your legs?"

He fumbled among the rags and disengaged a withered leg, which resembled a poker. He lifted it with his hand and placed it on the edge of the case.

"See what they're like? Both of 'em, born that way. They don't walk, they're not alive—just useless...."

"And what are in those little boxes?"

"That's my manigery," he said, picking his leg up with his hand as if it were a stick and thrusting it back among the rags at the bottom of the case. Then with a bright friendly smile he said:

"Would you like to see it? Then sit down properly, you've never seen anything like it in your life."

With deft movements of his thin, disproportionately long arms he raised himself and began taking boxes off the shelves, handing them to me one by one.

"Be careful, don't open them, they'll run away! Put it to your ear and listen! Well?"

"Something stirring inside."

"Aha. That's a spider, the blighter! He's called the Drummer. As cunning as they make 'em!"

The wonderful eyes lighted up and a smile played upon the bluish face. With swift deft hands he took the boxes off the shelves, put them to his ear, then to mine and commented animatedly:

"And here's cockroach Anisim, a braggart, like a soldier. This

is a fly. Mrs. Official, a nasty piece o' work. Buzzing all day long, swearing at everybody, she even dragged Mummy around by the hair. Not the fly—the Missus living across the road, the fly only looks like her. And this is a black beetle, a great big beetle—the Boss; he's not bad, only he's a drunkard and a shameless fellow. When he's on the booze he crawls about the yard naked, all hairy like a black dog. And here is a dung-beetle, Uncle Nikodim. I caught him outside. He's a bum, really, calls himself a holy wanderer. Supposed to be collecting money for a church; Mummy calls him Cheapskate; he's one of her lovers too. She has umpteen lovers, thick as flies around her, though she has no nose."

"Does she beat you?"

"Who, she? I like that! She can't live without me. She's kind-hearted, only a drunkard—but then they're all drunkards in our street. She's beautiful and gay, too.... A hell of a drunkard, a whore! I tell her: get off the booze, you silly woman, you'll get rich—but she just laughs. A fool of a woman, what can you expect! But she's good, you'll see when she wakes up."

He smiled engagingly, a smile so sweet that I felt like blubbering, crying out for the whole town to hear me, so deeply wrung was my heart with compassion. His beautiful head nodded on his thin neck like a strange flower, and his eyes, growing brighter and brighter with animation, attracted me with irresistible force.

Listening to his childish, but ghastly prattle, I had forgotten for a moment where I was, and suddenly I became aware again of the prison-like window, spattered with mud outside, the black maw of the stove, the pile of oakum in the corner, and by the door, on a heap of rags, yellow like oil, the body of the mother-woman.

"Nice manigery, isn't it?" the boy said with pride.

"Very nice."

"I have no butterflies, though—no butterflies or moths."

"What's your name?"

"Lyonka."

"You're my namesake."

"Really? What kind of person are you?"

"Oh, just nobody."

"Tell me another one! Every person is somebody, I ought to know. You're a good body."

"Maybe."

"I can see it. You're scary, too."

"Scary?"

"You bet!"

He smiled a knowing smile and even winked at me.

"What makes you think I'm scary?"

"Well, you're sitting with me here, and that shows you're scared to go out at night!"

"But day is breaking already."

"And you'll go away."

"I'll come again to see you."

He did not believe me. He covered those sweet shaggy eyes of his with his eyelashes, then said, after a pause:

"What for?"

"To sit with you. You are very interesting. May I come?"

"Go ahead. Everyone comes here."

With a sigh he added:

"You're only kidding."

"I'm not. I'll come, really!"

"All right then. But come to me, not to Mummy—who wants her? Let's be friends, you and me!"

"All right."

"There. It doesn't matter that you're a grownup. How old are you?"

"Getting on for twenty-one."

"And I'm getting on for twelve. I have no chums, only Katka the water-carrier's girl, but her mother beats her because she comes to see me. Are you a thief?"

"No. Why a thief?"

"You've got such an ugly mug, skinny as anything and with a long nose, just like thieves have. We have two thieves coming here, one of 'em Sashka, a fool and a bully, the other Vanichka—he's kind-hearted, like a dog. Have you got any little boxes?"

"I'll bring some."

"Do. I won't tell Mummy you're coming."

"Why not?"

"Just like that. She's ever so pleased when men come again. She loves men, the baggage—not half she does. A funny kid, that Mummy o' mine. Got herself in the family way with me when she was fifteen and doesn't know herself how it happened. When will you be coming?"

"Tomorrow evening."

"By evening she'll be drunk. What do you do for a living if you don't thief?"

"I sell Bavarian kvass."

"Do you? Bring me a bottle, eh?"

"Why, sure. Well, I'll be going."

"Go ahead. Will you come again?"

"Sure."

He held out both long arms and I took those thin cold little bones in my own two hands and shook them. Without looking back at him I clambered out into the yard like a drunken man.

Day was breaking. A tremulous dying Venus hung over the damp heap of tumbledown structures. The square eyes of the basement windows, dull and dirty like the eyes of a drunkard, stared at me out of the muddy hole beneath the wall of the house. A red-faced man lay asleep in a cart by the gate, his huge bare legs sprawled wide apart and his thick stiff beard sticking up into the sky—white teeth shone in it, as if the man, his eyes shut, were laughing fiendishly, derisively. An old dog with a bald patch on its back, apparently caused by scalding water, came up to me, sniffed at my leg and whimpered hungrily, filling my heart with unbidden compassion.

The puddles in the streets, which had settled overnight, mirrored the morning sky, and the blue and pink reflections gave to the dirty puddles an offensive, needless, soul-confounding beauty.

The next day I asked the children in my street to catch some beetles and butterflies for me; I bought some pretty little boxes at the chemist's and went to see Lyonka, taking with me two bottles of kvass, some honey-cakes, sweets and buns.

Lyonka received my gifts with utter amazement, his eyes wide and more beautiful than ever in the light of day.

"Gosh!" he said in a deep unchildlike voice. "Look at all this! Are you a rich man, or what? How can it be—a rich man, so poorly dressed, and not a thief, you say? Gee, what lovely boxes! I'm afraid to touch 'em even, I haven't washed my hands. What's that inside? Oo-ow—what a whopper of a beetle! All coppery, even green—oh, gosh! What if they run out and fly away?! Nothing doing."

Then all of a sudden he shouted gaily:

"Mum! Come on, you tart, get down and wash my hands. Just look what he's brought. You know, the one who came last night and lugged you in, like the copper on point duty. His name's

Lyonka too."

"You should say thank you to him," I heard an oddly quiet voice behind me.

The boy nodded vigorously:

"Thank you, thank you!"

A dense cloud of hair-like dust floated about in the basement, and through it I could just make out, on the ledge of the stove, the frowzy head, the disfigured face of the woman, the glint of her teeth, bared in that involuntary, ineffaceable smile.

"Good morning!"

"Good morning," the woman answered. Her snuffling voice was quiet but cheerful, almost gay. She looked at me through narrowed eyes, in a mocking sort of way.

Lyonka, forgetting about me, was chewing a honey-cake, mumbling to himself as he carefully opened the boxes. His eye-lashes cast a shadow on his cheeks, accentuating the blue under his eyes. The sun, bleary like the face of an old man, looked through the dirty windowpanes. It shed a soft light on the boy's reddish hair. His shirt was open at the throat and I could hear the heart beating behind the thin bones, raising the skin and the barely perceptible nipple.

His mother got down from the stove, moistened a towel under the wash-stand, went up to Lyonka and took his left hand.

"He's run away, stop, he's run away!" he shouted, wriggling about in his box, twisting his whole body round, scattering the rags beneath him and baring his livid immobile legs. The woman laughed, fumbling among the rags.

"Catch him!" she shouted.

She caught the beetle, placed it in the palm of her hand, examined it with sprightly eyes the colour of cornflowers, and said to me in the tone of an old acquaintance:



"We have lots of these."

"Don't squash it," her son said warningly. "She sat down on my manigery once when she was drunk and squashed a whole lot of 'em."

"Forget it, my precious."

"I buried them, heaps of 'em."

"But I caught some more for you afterwards, didn't I?"

"What's the use! Those you squashed were trained beetles, stupid head. When they peg out I bury them under the stove—I crawl out and bury 'em—I have a cemetery there. You know, I once had a spider, Minka, just like one of Mum's lovers—one of the old ones who's now in jail, a fat, jolly fellow—"

"Oh, you precious darling," the woman said, stroking the boy's curls with a small, dark, stubby-fingered hand. Then, nudging me with her elbow, she said with smiling eyes:

"A fine son? What eyes, eh?"

"You can take one eye and give me back my legs," Lyonka said, grinning, as he examined the beetle. "Looks like iron. Fat. Like that monk, Mum—the one you knitted the ladder for—remember?"

"I should say I do."

Laughing, she began to tell me the story.

"A monk blew in one day, a great huiking fellow, and he says, 'Now you're a tow-picker—can you make me a rope ladder?' I'd never heard of such ladders in all my born days. No, I says, I couldn't. 'Then I'll teach you,' he says. He threw open his cas-sock, and would you believe it, he had a thin rope wound round his whole belly, a long coil of strong rope. He taught me how to do it. I knitted away and kept wondering: now, what does he want it for? To rob a church maybe?"

She laughed, put her arm round her son's shoulder and kept

stroking it.

"A bunch o' lively cards! He came at the appointed time, and I says to him: If you want this for robbery, my man, then I'm not having any! But he just laughs kind o' cunningly. 'No,' he says, 'it's for climbing over a wall. We've got a big high wall down at our place, and we're sinful men, with sin living just on the other side of the wall -get me?' I got it then. He wanted it to go out wenching at night. Did we laugh, he and I."

"You love a good laugh, you do," the boy said in the tone of an elder. "What about putting on the samovar?"

"But we have no sugar."

"Go and buy some."

"We have no money either."

"Ugh, your drinking's a ruination! Take some from him." He turned to me: "Have you got any money?"

I gave the woman some money. She sprang to her feet with alacrity, took a small, dented, smudgy samovar off the stove, and went out, humming a tune to herself.

"Mummy!" the boy shouted after her. "Wash the window, I can't see anything!"

"Smart bit o' poultry, let me tell you!" he went on, as he carefully laid the boxes with the insects out on the shelves. The shelves were of cardboard, suspended on strings from nails driven between the bricks of the damp wall. "Hard-working too. When she starts picking the tow you can choke. The place is full o' dust. I cry: Mummy take me out into the yard, for God's sake, I'll choke in here. But she says, put up with it, keep me company, she says. She loves me, no mistake! She works and sings, knows thousands o' songs, she does."

Animated, his wonderful eyes glowing, his thick eye-brows raised, he began to sing in a hoarse alto voice:

*There on the sofa lies Sophie....*

After listening for a while, I said:

"That isn't a nice song."

"They're all like that," Lyonka reassured me, then suddenly started: "Hark, the music has arrived! Quick, lift me up."

I raised his light little bones enclosed in a sack of grey thin skin. Eagerly, he thrust his head through the open window and hung there stock-still, his withered legs dangling helplessly down the wall. Outside, a street-organ was raucously grinding out scraps of some tune or other, a bass-voiced child was shouting joyfully and a dog was howling quietly. Lyonka listened to this music and hummed softly in tune with it.

The dust in the basement had settled and it grew lighter. Over his mother's bed hung a cheap clock, its pendulum, the size of a penny, crawling limpingly over the grey wall. The dishes on the hearth were unwashed, and on everything lay a thick layer of dust, heaviest of all on the cobwebs in the corners, which hung down in dirty tatters. Lyonka's dwelling resembled a dust hole, and the unmitigated ugliness of squalor stared one brazenly in the face from every inch of this hole.

The samovar began to hum its dismal tune, and the street-organ, as if scared by it, suddenly fell silent. A hoarse voice snarled: "Riff-raff!"

"Take me down," said Lyonka, sighing. "They've chased him away."

I seated him in the box, and he winced and rubbed his chest with his hands, coughing carefully.

"My chest hurts. Breathing real air a long time is bad for me. I say, did you ever see devils?"

"No."

"Nor did I. I keep looking under the stove in the night, in case

they come out. But they don't come. Devils haunt cemeteries, don't they?"

"What do you want with them?"

"It's interesting. What if one of the devils was a good one? Katka the water-carrier's girl saw a devilkin in the cellar—she took fright. But I'm not afraid of frightful things."

He tucked the rags round his legs and continued briskly:

"I like 'em even—I like frightful dreams, I do. I once dreamt a tree with the roots growing on top—the leaves on the ground and the roots stretching up into the sky. I was all in a sweat and woke up scared stiff. And once I saw Mummy—she was lying naked and a dog was eating out her stomach. He'd bite off a piece and spit it out, bite off another one and spit it out. And once our house shook itself and went riding down the street, its doors and windows banging, and that Official woman's cat running after it...."

He twitched his thin shoulders in a shivery way, took a sweet, unwrapped the coloured paper, smoothed it out carefully and laid it on the windowsill.

"I'll make all kinds of nice things out of these papers. Or maybe I'll give them to Katka. She likes nice things, too—bits of glass, crocks, papers and things. I say, if you keep feeding and feeding a beetle, it'll grow up like a horse, won't it?"

Clearly, he believed this, so I answered:

"If you feed it well, it will."

"No, really!" he cried, overjoyed. "But Mummy just laughs, the silly ninny!"

He added a foul swear word.

"She's foolish. You can feed a cat up to a horse much quicker, can't you?"

"I daresay."

"I haven't got the feed, worse luck. It would be grand!"

He was tense with excitement, his hand clutched tight to his chest.

"Flies would fly about the size of a dog. And you could use a beetle to haul loads of bricks—if he's as big as a horse, he'd be strong, wouldn't he!"

"The trouble is they've got whiskers."

"That doesn't matter, you can use the whiskers as reins. Or take a crawling spider, say—a whopper as big as ... as what? I wouldn't have him bigger'n a kitten, though, he'd be too frightful! I wish I had legs, I'd show 'em what's what! I'd work like mad and feed up my whole manigery. I'd open a shop, and afterwards I'd buy Mummy a house in an open field. Have you ever been in an open field?"

"Why, yes."

"What is it like, tell me?"

I began to tell him about fields and meadows, and he listened attentively without interrupting. His eyelashes dropped over his eyes and his mouth opened slowly as if the boy were falling asleep. Seeing this, I lowered my voice, but his mother came in with the boiling samovar, a paper bag under her arm and a bottle of vodka sticking out from under her jacket.

"Here we are!"

"Could you beat that," sighed the boy, wide-eyed. "Nothing but grass and flowers. Mum, couldn't you get a hand-cart somewhere and take me out into the open field! I'll die without ever seeing it. You're such a pig, Mum, really!" he would up in a sad pained voice.

His mother said kindly: "You shouldn't swear. You're too little yet."

"It's all right for you to say 'don't swear'—you go where you

like, just like a dog. You're lucky. I say," he said, turning to me, "was it God who made the field?"

"I suppose so."

"What for?"

"For people to walk in."

"Open field," the boy said, smiling wistfully. "I'd take my manigery out there and set them all free, I would. Let 'em have a good time, my domestics. I say, do they make God in a *bogadelnya*?"<sup>1</sup>

His mother squealed, convulsed with laughter. She threw herself down on the bed, kicking her legs and shrieking :

"Oh, carry me upstairs, somebody! Oh, my precious! Oh, what a scream!"

Lyonka glanced at her with a smile and affectionately uttered a dirty swearword.

"Gets herself in stitches, just like a child! She loves a good laugh, she does."

And he used the swearword again.

"Let her laugh," I said. "You don't mind, do you?"

"No, I don't mind." Lyonka agreed. "I'm only angry with her when she doesn't wash the window. I keep begging her, wash the window, I can't see the blessed daylight, but she forgets all the time."

The woman chuckled as she washed the tea things and winked to me with a bright blue eye.

"Isn't he a jewel, bless his heart? If it wasn't for him I'd have drowned myself a long time ago, really! Or hanged myself."

She said this smiling.

Lyonka suddenly asked me:

"Are you a fool?"

"I don't know. Why?"



"Mummy says you are a fool."

"Yes, but why?" the woman exclaimed, not at all put out. "He brings a drunken woman in from the street, puts her to bed and goes off, just like that! I didn't mean it spitefully. What a telltale you are, ugh!"

She, too, spoke like a child, her manner of speech was that of a little girl. Her eyes, too, were clear as a child's—all the more ugly by contrast was her noseless face with the raised upper lip and bared teeth. A sort of walking, sinister sneer, a gay mockery.

"Well, let's have tea," she said with a solemn air.

The samovar stood on a case next to Lyonka, and a mischievous jet of steam spouting from under the dented lid touched his shoulder. He put his hand over it, and when his palm became moist from the steam, he wiped it on his hair, his eyes wearing a dreamy look.

"When I grow up big," he said, "Mum will make me a handcart and I'll crawl about the streets, go begging. And when I've begged enough money I'll crawl out into the open field."

"Oho-ho," his mother sighed and the next moment laughed softly. "He thinks a field is a paradise, the darling! But there are only camps there, and shameless soldiers, and drunks."

"No, there aren't," Lyonka checked her, frowning. "You ask him what it's like, he's seen it."

"So have I."

"When drunk."

They started arguing, just like children. Just as hotly and illogically. Meanwhile, warm evening had set in, and a thick grey-blue cloud stood in the reddening sky. It grew dark in the basement.

The boy drank a mug of tea and perspired. He glanced at me,

then at his mother, and said:

"I'm full up, I even feel sleepy, really...."

"Go to sleep then," his mother advised.

"And he'll go away! Will you go away?"

"Don't worry, I won't let him go," the woman said, nudging me with her knee.

"Don't go away," Lyonka said. He shut his eyes, stretched luxuriously and dropped back into his packing-case. Then suddenly he raised his head and said to his mother in a tone of rebuke:

"Why don't you marry him like other women do, instead of messing about with every Tom, Dick and Harry—they only beat you. He's a kind man, he is...."

"Go to sleep," the woman said softly, bending over the saucer from which she was drinking her tea.

"And he's rich."

For a minute the woman was silent, sipping the tea with awkward lips, then she said to me as she would to an old acquaintance:

"So that's how we live, just jogging along, he and I and no one else. They scold me out in the yard—call me a loose woman. So what? I've got nothing to be ashamed of. Besides, I'm damaged goods on the outside, as you can see. Everyone can see at once what I'm good for. Yes. He's fallen asleep, my precious. It's a good child I have."

"Yes. Very good!"

"I can't get enough of looking at him. Clever, too, isn't he?"

"A wise head."

"You said it. His father was a gentleman, an old boy. One of those—what d'you call 'em? They have an office—you know. Write papers."

"A notary?"

"That's it! Nice old gentleman. Kind. He loved me, I worked as a maid in his house."

She covered her son's bare legs with the rags, arranged the dark thing that served as a pillow under his head, then resumed in an easy manner:

"All of a sudden he died. It happened in the night, soon after I had left him. He dropped down on the floor, just dropped down dead. You're in business—selling kvass?"

"Yes."

"On your own?"

"For a boss."

She moved closer, saying:

"You needn't feel squeamish about me, young man. I'm not infectious any more, ask anyone in the street, they all know it."

"I'm not squeamish."

She laid her small hand with the roughened finger and broken nails on my knee and went on earnestly:

"I am ever so grateful to you for Lyonka—it's been a real holiday for him today. This is a good thing you have done."

"I must be going," I said.

"Where?" she asked, surprised.

"I have business to attend to."

"Stay here!"

"I can't."

She looked at her son, then at the window and the sky, and said quietly:

"Why not stay? I'll cover my mug with a kerchief. I do want to thank you for my son's sake. I'll cover myself up, eh?"

She spoke with such earnest human warmth, with such good feeling. And her eyes—the eyes of a child in a disfigured face—

smiled, not the smile of a beggar, but that of a rich person, who could pay his debt of gratitude.

"Mummy!" the boy suddenly cried out, sitting up with a start. "They're crawling! Quick, Mummy!"

"He's been dreaming," she said to me, bending over her son.

I went out into the yard and stood there, sunk in thought. From the open window of the basement flowed a loud song, a mother's lullaby to her son. It was sung in gay snuffling tones and the strange words were clearly enunciated:

*The Creepy-Crawlies came again,  
With all the misery and all the pain,  
Miseries without number,  
To tear the heart asunder!  
Woe's me, woe's me!  
Whither shall we flee?*

I left the yard quickly, grinding my teeth to keep from howling.

1917



Fyodor Dostoevsky





## The Honest Thief

*From the Memoirs of an Unknown*

One morning as I was leaving for my office, Agrafena, my cook, washerwoman, and housekeeper, came into my room and, to my great surprise, began a conversation with me. Until that morning this simple, ordinary woman of the people had been so uncommunicative that, except for a few words about my dinner each day, she had for the last six years scarcely uttered a word to me. At least I never heard her speak of anything else.

"I'd like to have a word with you, sir," she began abruptly. "Why don't you let the little room?"

"Which little room?"

"Why, as if you didn't know, sir. The one next to the kitchen, of course!"

"What for?"

"What for, sir? Why, don't you know? Because other people let their rooms, of course!"

"But who would take it?"

"Who would take it, sir? Why, surely, sir, you know who would take it. A lodger, of course."

"But, my good woman, who'd like to live in a cubby-hole like that? Why, its nothing but a boxroom. I doubt if you could put a bed in it, and even if you could, there wouldn't be any room left to move about in."

"Why, sir, nobody wants to live in it. All he wants is a place to sleep in. He'd live on the windowsill."

"Which windowsill?"

"Why, as if you didn't know, sir! The windowsill in the

passage, of course. He could sit there and sew, or do whatever he liked. He could sit on a chair, if he liked. He's got a chair, and a table, too. He's got everything, sir."

"But who is he?"

"Oh, he's a good man, sir. He's had a lot of experience in his life, he has, sir. I'll cook for him, and I'll only charge him ten roubles a month for his board and lodging."

After the exercise of a great deal of patience, I found that an elderly man had persuaded or somehow induced Agrafena to admit him to her kitchen as a paying guest. Now, I knew very well that if Agrafena ever took it into her head to do a thing, it had better be done at once, or she would give me no peace. For whenever anything was not to her liking, Agrafena became moody and fell a prey to the blackest melancholy which lasted for a fortnight or three weeks. During that time my dinners were uneatable, my floors remained unscrubbed, and several indispensable articles were missing from my personal washing, in short, my life became one long chapter of the most unfortunate accidents. I had long ago observed that this inarticulate woman was quite incapable of making up her mind or of fixing her mind on an idea that might be said to be her own. But if her feeble brain did once in a while conceive something resembling an idea or a plan, then to prevent her from carrying it into immediate execution was tantamount to putting her for some time morally out of existence. That being so, and my peace of mind being dearer to me than anything else in the world, I at once accepted Agrafena's proposal to take in a lodger.

"Tell me, has he at least some papers? A passport or something?"

"Why yes, sir. Of course he has. He's a good man, sir, just as I was telling you. A man with experience. Promised to pay me

ten roubles a month, he *did*."

The very next day my new lodger installed himself in my modest bachelor quarters. I can't say that I was very sorry; on the contrary, in my heart of hearts I felt rather pleased. I live, on the whole, a very secluded sort of life, the life of a regular recluse. I have no acquaintances to speak of and I scarcely ever go out. Having spent ten years of my life in complete isolation from the world, I had naturally got used to solitude. But another ten, fifteen, or even more years of the same solitude, with the same Agrafena and in the same bachelor quarters, did not strike me as a particularly inviting prospect. So that in these circumstances another man, a man, moreover, of quiet habits, was a real blessing.

Agrafena had not deceived me; my lodger was a man of great experience of the world. His passport brought to light the fact that he was an old soldier; but that I knew even before I had opened it. One look at a man is sufficient to tell you that. My lodger, Astafy Ivanovich, was the finest specimen of an old soldier that it was ever my good fortune to come across. But what I liked best about him was that now and again he would tell some really good stories, mostly incidents from his own life. In view of the habitual boredom of my sort of existence, such a story-teller was a real find to me. One of the stories he told me left a vivid impression upon my mind. It arose out of the following circumstance.

I was alone in my flat, Astafy and Agrafena having gone out on business. Suddenly I heard somebody come in, and thinking it was a stranger, I went out of my room to see who it might be. It really was a stranger, a short man, who in spite of the cold autumn day, wore no overcoat.

"What do you want?"

"Does a civil servant by the name of Alexandrov live here?"

"No, I'm afraid there's no one here of that name," I replied, and I bade him a curt goodbye.

"That's odd," the stranger said, beating a cautious retreat to the door, "the caretaker told me he lived here."

"Get out! Beat it!"

Next day after dinner, while Astafy was fitting on a coat he was altering for me, someone came into the passage. I opened the door a little, and there before my very eyes my yesterday's visitor calmly took down my short winter overcoat from the coat-rack and, putting it under his arm, dashed out of the flat. Agrafena did nothing but gape at him, struck dumb with astonishment, and did not lift a finger to protect my property. Astafy Ivanovich ran out after the thief, and he came back ten minutes later, out of breath and empty-handed. The man had just vanished into thin air!

"That's a bit of bad luck, Astafy Ivanovich," I said. "A good job I've still got my winter cloak, or the villain would have left me absolutely stranded."

But Astafy Ivanovich was so overcome by it all that, looking at him, I almost forgot the loss I had suffered. He simply couldn't get over it. Every minute he would throw down the work on which he was engaged and start recounting the whole incident, how it had all happened, how he had been standing only a few feet away from the man, how the thief had taken down the coat before his very eyes, and how it had come about that he had not been able to catch him. Then he would sit down at his work again, but only to leave it a minute later, and I saw him go down to the caretaker to tell him all about it and to remonstrate with him for allowing such things to happen in his house. Then he came back and began lecturing Agrafena. When

at last he did finally sit down to his work, he went on muttering to himself a long time, how it all happened, how he stood here and I there, how before his very eyes, hardly a few feet away, the man took the coat off the rack, and so on. In short, though a good man at his trade, Astafy Ivanovich was a terrible fellow for getting himself all worked up and making no end of a fuss.

"We've been fooled, Astafy Ivanovich," I said to him in the evening, offering him a glass of tea and hoping to dispel my boredom by making him tell me again the story of the stolen coat; for from its frequent repetition and the great sincerity of the speaker, I was beginning to find the story highly amusing.

"Aye, sir, we've been fooled all right," said Astafy Ivanovich. "Mind you, its not my business, of course, but I can't help being upset all the same. It fairly makes my blood boil, it does, sir, though it's not my coat that's been stolen. For to my thinking, sir, there's no worse villain in the world than a thief. Aye, I've known many a man who'd take your things and never dream of paying for them. but a thief, sir, steals the work of your hands, the sweat of your brow, and your time, too. A nasty piece of work, that's what he is sir. Makes my blood boil just to talk about him. But begging your pardon, sir, how is it you don't seem to care about the loss of your property?"

"Well, Astafy Ivanovich, you're quite right of course. It is a confounded nuisance. I'd much rather burn my things than let a thief have them."

"Well, sir, its a nuisance all right. Though, mind you, there are thieves and thieves. I well remember, sir, coming across an honest thief once."

"An honest thief? Why, how can a man be honest and a thief at the same time, Astafy Ivanovich?"

"Well, sir, that's true enough. There are no honest thieves,



and there never have been any. What I wanted to say, sir, was that the man I had in mind seemed honest enough, but he stole all the same. Aye, I just couldn't help being sorry for him."

"Why, how did that happen, Astafy Ivanovich?"

"Well, sir, it happened two years ago. At the time *I'd* been out of work for nearly a year, and just before I lost my job I struck up an acquaintance with a man I accidentally met in a pub. Down and out he was. A terrible drunkard, loafer, vagabond. Been a clerk in some government office, but got chucked out a long time ago on account of his drinking. Lord, what a disgraceful sight he was! Walked about in rags, and sometimes I wasn't sure he had a shirt under his coat. No sooner did he get something then he'd spend it on drink. Not that he was what you might call obstreperous. No, sir, he was a very quiet man, kind and gentle, and he'd never ask you for anything on account of being very shy by nature. But of course I couldn't help seeing how badly the poor fellow wanted a drink, so I'd stand him one. Well, so we became good friends. I mean to say, sir, it was he really who got himself attached to me. I didn't mind either way. And what a funny man he was, sir! Stuck to me like a dog, followed me about everywhere, and that after I'd only met him once. No character at all. A rag of a man! At first he asked me to let him stay the night. Well, I did. For you see, sir, I had a look at his passport, and there was nothing wrong with it—the man was all right! The next day he wanted to stay again, and on the following day he came and spent the whole day on my window-sill. Stayed the night, too. 'Good Lord,' I thought to myself, 'I shan't be able to get rid at him now—provide food and drink for him, and a bed as well!' Just a poor man's luck, sir. Nothing to eat myself, and here's a perfect stranger to carry about on my back! Nor was it the first time he had hung on to somebody he'd

never seen before. He used to spend his days with some clerk before he ran across me in the pub. They were always out drinking together. Only the poor man seemed to have had some serious trouble, for he soon drank himself to death. Anyway, the man I'm telling you about, sir, was called Yemelyan Ilyich. I was racking my brains what to do with him. I couldn't just chuck him out. I was dreadfully sorry for the poor beggar. You can't imagine, sir, what a pitiful wreck of a man he was. Never uttered a word, never asked for anything, just sat there gazing into my eyes like a dog. That's what drink does to a man, sir! Well, so there I was wondering what to say to the man. I couldn't very well say, 'Look here, Yemelyan, you'd better go. This is no place for you. You've come to the wrong man. Soon I shall have nothing to eat myself, so how can you expect me to keep you?' I wondered, sir, what he would have done if I'd said that to him. Well, I knew very well of course that if I told him that he'd sit there looking at me a long time without at first being able to take in what I was saying, and when he at last saw what I meant he'd get up from the window, pick up his little bundle (I can see that bundle now, sir, a red check bundle full of holes that he carried about with him everywhere and that he used to stuff all sorts of rubbish into), and set his tattered old coat to rights to make it look decent and keep him warm, and so that the holes didn't show—very particular he was about his appearance! Then he'd open the door and go out on the landing with tears in his eyes. Well, sir, I couldn't let a man go to the dogs like that—I was really sorry for him! But, I thought next, what was going to happen to me when I lost my job? 'Wait a bit, Yemelyan, my dear fellow,' I says to myself, 'you won't be eating and drinking and making merry at my expense very much longer now. I'll be moving soon, and then, my lad, its ten to one you'll never find

me.'

"Well, sir, one fine day I did move. My old master, Alexander Filimonovich (he's dead now, God rest his soul!), said to me at the time, "I'm very satisfied with you, Astafy," he said. 'We shan't forget you, and when we come back from the country we'll take you on again.' I had been his butler, oh, for many years—a grand man he was, too, but he died a few months later. Well, so after seeing them off, I collected my belongings, what little money I had, thinking to take it easy for a bit, and went to live with an old lady I knew. Took a small room in her flat. She had only that small room to spare. She used to be in service herself, a nursemaid she was but now she lived by herself on her pension. "Well,' I says to myself, 'it's goodbye for good, Yemelyan, old fellow. You'll never find me now!'

"Well, sir, what do you think? I came back in the evening (I had gone out to see a man I knew), and there was Yemelyan sitting quietly on my chest in his tattered old coat and with his bundle beside him, and to while away the time he had borrowed a book from my land-lady (a prayer book it was), and he was holding it in his hands—upside-down! So he had found me after all! I gave up. 'It's no use,' I thought to myself. 'It can't be helped. Why didn't you get rid of him at first?' So knowing very well that he had come to stay, I just said to him, 'You haven't forgotten your passport, Yemelyan, have you?'

"Well, sir, so I sat down and began to consider what to do next. 'After all,' thought I, 'what harm can a homeless old tramp do you?' And on thinking it over, I decided that the harm he'd do me wouldn't amount to much. 'He'll have to have something to eat of course,' I thought. Well, I'll give him a piece of bread in the morning, and to make the meal more tasty like, buy an onion or two. At midday I'll give him another bit of bread and

onion, and for supper some more onion with *kvas*, and bread, too, if he asks for it. And should some cabbage soup come our way, we'll have a real feast, the two of us' I'm no great eater myself, and it's a well-known fact, sir, that a drinking man never eats: all he wants is vodka and a drop of brandy. 'He'll ruin me with his drinking,' thought I, and as I was thinking of that something else occurred to me, something I couldn't get out of my head. For I suddenly realised, sir, that if Yemelyan was to go, here'd be nothing left for me to live for. So I made up my mind here and then to be his only provider and benefactor. 'I must get him to give up drinking,' I thought, 'I must save him from utter ruin.' 'All right, Yemelyan, old fellow,' I says to myself, 'you can stay if you like, but, mind, behave yourself—orders is orders!'

"The first thing I decided to do, sir, was to teach Yemelyan some trade, find a job of work for him to do. Naturally, it couldn't be done all at once. 'Let him enjoy himself a little first,' I says to myself, 'and in the meantime I'll think of something, find out what special abilities you possess, Yemelyan, what kind of work you're good at.' For every job, sir, first of all requires that the man engaged in it should have the right kind of ability. Well, sir, so I starts observing him on the quiet, and it didn't take me long to find out that poor old Yemelyan was a desperate case. Aye, there was nothing at all he was good for. So I first of all gives him a piece of good advice. 'Why, Yemelyan,' I says to him, 'take a look at yourself, and do,' I says, 'try to make yourself a bit more respectable like. Look at the rags you go about in. Look at that disgraceful old coat of yours! Why, God forgive me, all it's good for is to make a sieve out of. Fie, for shame, Yemelyan,' I says. 'Its about time you turned over a new leaf and became a changed man!'

"Well, sir, poor old Yemelyan just sits listening to me with his head hanging down. There was nothing you could do with him. Why, drink had robbed him even of speech. Couldn't say a sensible word, he couldn't. Talk to him about cucumbers and he talks back to you about kidney-beans! He listened to me a long time, then he just heaved a sigh.

"What are you sighing for, Yemelyan?"

"Oh, nothing,' he says, 'don't take any notice of me, Astafy. Do you know,' he says, 'do you know, Astafy, I saw two women fighting in the street today. One upset the other's basket of cranberries on purpose.'

"Well, what about it?"

"Well, you see, Astafy, so the second woman upsets the first woman's cranberries on purpose and starts stamping on them!"

"Well, so what about it, Yemelyan?"

"Oh, nothing, Astafy. I just thought I'd tell you, thats all."

"That's all! Oh, Yemelyan, Yemelyan,' thought I, 'drink has been your undoing, and no mistake!"

"And you know, Astafy, a gentleman dropped a note on the pavement in Gorokhovaya Street—no, not in Gorokhovaya Street, in Sadovaya Street it was—and a peasant saw it and said, My lucky day! But another peasant also saw it and said, No, sir, its my lucky day! I saw it first!..."

"Well, Yemelyan?"

"Well, so the two peasants had a fight, and a policeman came up, picked up the note, gave it back to the gentleman, and threatened to take the two peasants to the police station!"

"Well, so what about it, Yemelyan? I mean what is there specially instructive about it?"

"Why, I didn't mean anything, Astafy. Only the people in the street did laugh a lot."



“Oh, Yemelyan, Yemelyan, what does it matter what the people in the street do? Think of yourself, Yemelyan, think of your immortal soul which you’ve sold for a few coppers. You know what, Yemelyan?”

“What, Astafy?”

“Why don’t you get yourself some work? You really ought to, you know. For the hundredth time I’m telling you, Yemelyan—have pity on yourself!”

“But what work do you want me to get, Astafy? I really don’t know what work I can do, and besides, I don’t think anyone will give me any work.”

“Of course they won’t give you any work, you drunkard! Why else do you think they chucked you out of the civil service?”

“You know, Astafy, Vlas, the potboy, was summoned to the office today.”

“And why did they summon him to the office?”

“I really don’t know, Astafy. I suppose they must have wanted him, so they sent for him.”

“‘Ah well,’ thought I, ‘there’s no hope, it seems, for either of us, Yemelyan, old fellow. The good Lord must be punishing us for our sins!’ And what indeed can you do with a man like that, I ask you, sir!

“But he was devilishly cunning, Yemelyan was. He’d listen quietly to me a long time, but sooner or later he’d get bored, and the minute he noticed that I was beginning to lose my temper, he’d pick up his old coat and sheer off. He’d loaf about all day and come back dead drunk in the evening. I don’t know who paid for his drinks or where he got the money to pay for them himself. I had nothing to do with it!

“‘Now look here, Yemelyan,’ I says to him at last, ‘if you



go on like this very much longer, you're sure to come to a bad end. Stop drinking, do you hear? Give it up! Next time you come home drunk,' I says, 'you'll jolly well have to spend the night on the stairs. I'm damned if I'll let you in!'

"Well, sir, he saw of course that I really meant it this time, so for the next two days he didn't go out, but on the third day he cleared off again. I sat up waiting for him, but he didn't come back. To tell you the truth, sir, I was beginning to feel a bit uneasy, and, besides, I couldn't help feeling sorry for him. 'What have I done to him?' I thought. I've gone and scared him away good and proper now! Where could he have got to, the poor wretch? Pray God, nothing happens to him!' Well, night came and he wasn't back. In the morning I went out on the landing and there he was, sir! Spent the night on the landing, he had. Puts his head on the top step and falls asleep like that. Chilled to the marrow he was.

"What made you do it, Yemelyan? What a place to spend the night in!'

"Well, you were so angry with me the other night, Astafy. You were so terribly vexed and—er—promised to make me spend the night on the landing, so I—well— I didn't dare to come in, Astafy, and went to sleep here.'

"I felt mad at him and sorry for him, too, at the same time.

"Why, surely, Yemelyan,' I says, 'you might have got yourself a different kind of job. What's the use of guarding a flight of stairs?'

"But what different kind of job do you mean, Astafy?'

"Why, you good-for-nothing loafer,' I says (fair mad I was at him, sir!), 'you could at least have tried to learn the tailor's trade! Look at that coat of yours! You're not satisfied, it seems, to have it all in holes, you have to sweep the stairs with it, too!

Why don't you take a needle and thread and patch it up? You would have done it long ago, if you had had any sense of decency left. Oh,' I says, 'you drunkard!'

"Well, would you believe it, sir? He did take a needle and thread! I had meant it as a joke, but he got properly scared, so he took off his coat and sat down to patch it up. I looked at him: his eyes were red and bleary, and his hands shook something terrible! He shoved and shoved, but the thread just wouldn't go through the eye of the needle. How he tried, sir! Screwed up his eyes, wetted the thread, twisted it in his fingers, but it was no use. So he gave it up and looked at me.

' "Well, Yemelyan,' I says, 'you've certainly made me proud of you! If there'd been anybody about,' I says, 'I'd have sunk through the floor for shame. Why, you poor fool, don't you realise that I was joking, that I just meant it as a reproach? Now, leave it alone,' I says, 'and don't attempt to do anything you can't, and for goodness sake don't sleep on the stairs! Don't disgrace me by doing such a disreputable thing ever again!'

" "But what am I to do, Astafy? I know very well that I'm always drunk and that I'm not good for anything. It seems to me all I am good for is to cause you, my be-ne-factor, unnecessary trouble....'

"And, sir, as he said it his blue lips started quivering all of a sudden, and a tear rolled down his pale cheek and trembled on his stubby chin, and in another minute the poor fellow burst into a regular flood of tears.

" "Well, Yemelyan,' I says to myself, 'I never thought you had it in you. Who could have guessed you had such tender feelings?' No, I says to myself, 'no, it's no use deceiving myself. I ought to give up having anything to do with you. Go to the devil for all I care!'

“Well, sir, why make a long story of it? And, besides, it was such a sorry, miserable business that it is hardly worth wasting words on. I mean, sir, you wouldn’t, so to speak, give a brass farthing for the whole thing, though I would gladly have given a fortune, if I had had a fortune to give, that it should never have happened to me. You see, sir, I had a pair of riding breeches (the devil take ‘em!), lovely breeches they were, too, blue ones with a check pattern. They were ordered by a country gentleman who was on a visit to town, but he wouldn’t take ‘em, after all: they were too narrow for him, he said. Well, so they were left on my hands. ‘It’s a valuable article,’ I thought. ‘I might get fifteen roubles or more for them in the second-hand market, and even if I didn’t, I might manage to get two pairs of trousers for our Petersburg gentleman out of them, and have a piece over for a waistcoat for myself.’ To poor folk like us, sir, every little counts. Well, as it happened Yemelyan was having a very poor time just then. I had noticed that he had not had a drop of liquor for some days. He lost heart and looked down in the mouth. Aye, very miserable he looked, and that’s the truth. I couldn’t help feeling sorry to see him in such a sad state. ‘Well,’ I says to myself, ‘either you’ve got no money, my lad, or you’ve turned over a new leaf in good earnest, listened to reason at last, and given up drink for good.’ That’s how things stood just then, sir. As it happened, we had a church holiday at the time, and I went to evening service. When I came back, I found Yemelyan sitting on the windows ill blind drunk, rocking to and fro. Aha, thought I, so you’ve gone and done it again, my lad! And I went to fetch something from my chest. I opened it and the first thing I noticed was that my breeches were no longer there. Looked for them everywhere I could think of, but couldn’t find them. Well, after I’d turned the place upside down and all to no purpose, some-

thing seemed to stab me to the heart. I rushed off to my landlady and at first accused her of the theft. Aye, acted like a real madman. I did. Hardly knew what I was doing. You see, sir, it hadn't entered my head that Yemelyan was the real culprit, though the evidence was staring me in the face, as you might say, for the man was blind drunk! 'No, sir,' says my landlady, 'I never seen your breeches, and, anyway, what would I want with your breeches? I couldn't wear them, could I? Why,' she says, 'I missed a skirt of mine myself the other day, and I shouldn't wonder,' she says, 'if it wasn't one of those nice friends of yours who took it. As for your breeches,' she says, 'I know nothing about 'em.' 'But who was here while I was out,' I asked. 'Did anyone call?' 'No, sir,' she says, 'no one called. I've been here all the time and I ought to know. Yemelyan went out and came back. There he is. Why don't you ask him?' So I asked Yemelyan. 'Tell me, Yemelyan,' I says, 'you haven't by any chance taken them breeches of mine, have you? The new riding breeches, 'I says, 'I made specially for the country gentleman. You remember them, don't you?'

"'No, Astafy,' he says. 'I'm sure I—er—never took 'em'.

"Well, of all things! I started searching for them again, looked everywhere, but it was no use. And Yemelyan, sir, was sitting there all the time, rocking to and fro. I squats down over the chest on my heels in front of him, and all of a sudden I looks at him out of the corner of my eye. 'Ah well,' thought I, and fairly mad at him I was I can tell you. Got red in the face even. Then, quite unexpectedly, Yemelyan, too, looks at me.

"'No, Astafy,' he says, 'I never took your breeches. You're —er—perhaps thinking I did, but I never touched them!'

"'But where could they have got to, Yemelyan?'

"'Haven't the faintest idea, Astafy,' he says. 'I've never seen

them.'

"Well, in that case, Yemelyan,' I says, 'it seems they must have walked off by themselves, don't it?'

"Maybe they have, Astafy,' he says. "Maybe they have.'

"Well, sir, having heard what Yemelyan had to say for himself, I got up without another word, went over to the window, lighted my lamp, and set down to work. Altering a waistcoat for a civil servant on the floor below, I was just then. I was boiling with rage. I mean, sir, I'd have felt much happier if I'd taken all my clothes and lighted the stove with them. Well, Yemelyan must have guessed how bitter I felt. For a man given to wickedness, sir, scents trouble far off, like a bird before a storm.

"You know, Astafy,' began Yemelyan, and his weak voice shook as he spoke, 'the male nurse Antip Prokhorovich got married this morning to the wife of the coachman who died the other day...'

"Well, sir, I just gave him a look, and I suppose it must have been a very nasty look, too, for Yemelyan saw what I meant all right. So he gets up at once, goes over to the bed and starts searching for something on the floor there. I waited. He goes on rummaging a long time, muttering to himself, 'No, not here—not here. Where can the blessed thing have got to?' I waited to see what would happen. Then, believe it or not, sir, he crawled under the bed on all fours! Well, when I saw him do that, I couldn't hold out any longer.

"What are you crawling about under the bed for, Yemelyan?' I says.

"Why, Astafy; he says, 'I'm looking for your breeches, of course. Maybe they've dropped down there somewhere.'

"But why, sir,' I says (called him 'sir' out of sheer spite, I did), 'why, sir, should you go to so much trouble for a poor



ignorant man like me? Why crawl on your knees for nothing?’

“‘Why, Astafy; he says, “I don’t mind. Who knows, they might turn up if we go on looking for them long enough.”’

“‘Indeed?’ I says. “Look here, Yemelyan...”’

“‘Yes, Astafy?’

“‘Are you sure,’ I says, ‘you haven’t simply stolen them, like a common thief, in return for everything I done for you?’”

“‘You see, sir, it made me mad to see him crawling on his knees before me—the last straw, that was!

“‘No, I haven’t. . . Astafy.

“‘But he didn’t come out from under the bed. No, sir. Lay there a long time on his face, and when at last he did crawl out, he was as white as a sheet. He stood up, sat down beside me on the windowsill, and stayed sitting there for ten minutes, I reckon.

“‘No, Astafy’, he says all of a sudden, standing up and advancing towards me, looking (I can see him still) ghastly, ‘no, Astafy’, he says, I’ve never—er—touched your breeches.’

“‘He was shaking all over, pointing a quivering finger at his breast, and his voice shaking so dreadfully it gave me an awful turn and I just sat there as though I was stuck to the window.

“‘Well, Yemelyan,’ I says. ‘I’m sorry if, fool that I am, I’ve accused you unjustly. As for the breeches,’ I says, ‘I don’t care if they are lost. We can get along without them. We’ve still got our hands, thank God, and there’s no need for us to go thieving or... begging from some poor devil, either. We can always earn our bread...

“Yemelyan listened to me in silence, and after a while he sat down on the windowsill again. He stayed there all the evening, never stirring from his place. He was still there when I went to bed, and when I got up the next morning I found him curled up in his old coat on the bare floor. He was too humiliated, you see,



to come to bed. Well, sir, since that day I conceived a violent dislike for him, and to tell you the truth, sir, during the first few days I simply hated the sight of him. It was as though my own son, so to speak, had robbed me or done me some mortal injury.

"Well, sir, for the next fortnight Yemelyan was out on the spree, drinking hard all the time. Went off the rails good and proper, that is. He'd go out in the morning and come back late at night, and for the whole of that fortnight I never heard him utter a single word. I suppose he must have felt pretty low at the time, or maybe he even wanted to do himself in, one way or another. However, at last it was all over. There was no more drinking. I reckon he must have run through his money by then. At all events, there he was sitting in the window again. Sat there, if my memory serves me right, for three whole days, without uttering a word. Then all of a sudden I saw that he was crying. You see, sir, one minute he sat there as if nothing was wrong, and the next minute he was crying. And, Lord, how that man did cry! Tears streamed in a flood out of his eyes, while he seemed to be unaware of them, just like water pouring out of a well. Well, sir, its a terrible thing to see a man, and, particularly, an old man like Yemelyan, crying from sorrow and despair.

"What's the matter, Yemelyan?" I says.

"He started shaking all over. Was very startled, you see, for it was the first time that evening I had spoken to him.

"Nothing, Astafy. . . ."

"Now, look here, Yemelyan, what does it matter? Let the whole thing go hang, so far as I'm concerned. What are you sitting like a broody hen for?"

"Felt very sorry for him, I did, sir.

"Oh, it's nothing, Astafy. It isn't because of that at all. I've been thinking—er—I'd like to get some work, Astafy."

“‘What sort of work, Yemelyan?’

“‘Oh, any sort of work. Maybe I could find a job, same as I had before. I’ve already been to ask Fedossey Ivanovich.... I don’t want to be a burden to you, Astafy. Maybe when I find a job I’ll pay it all back and reward you for all your trouble.’

“‘Don’t talk such nonsense, Yemelyan. Suppose you did something you didn’t ought to—what does it matter? To hell with it! Let’s go on as we used to!’

“‘No, Astafy. I can see you’re still—er—harping on it, but I told you I never took your breeches.’

“‘Well, have it your own way. I don’t mind. I’m sure.’

“‘No, Astafy, I can see I can’t go on living with you. I’m sorry, Astafy, but I shall have to go.’

“‘But, bless my soul,’ I says, ‘who’s been offending you, Yemelyan? Who’s driving you out of the house? You don’t mean to say I’m doing it, do you?’

“‘No, Astafy. I can’t possibly stay with you now. I’d better be going.’

“You see, sir, the man was too cut up, kept harping on the same thing. And sure enough, he gets up and starts pulling his old coat over his shoulders.

“‘But where are you off to, Yemelyan? Be sensible, man. What are you doing? Where will you go?’

“‘Goodbye, Astafy. Don’t try to stop me (here he began whimpering again). I think it’s time I got out of your way. You’re no longer the same.’

“‘How do you mean I’m no longer the same? Of course I am the same! Mark my words, Yemelyan, you’ll perish like a helpless child by yourself.’

“‘No, Astafy, you’re not the same,’ he says. ‘Every time you go out now you lock up your chest, and I can’t help crying

when I see you do that. No, you'd better not try to stop me. Astafy, and forgive me if I done anything to offend you while living with you.'

"Well, sir, he did go. Left me that very day, he did. I waited the whole day for him, expecting him to be back in the evening, but no, he didn't come. There was no sign of him next day, either, nor the day after. I got really worried, so worried that I could neither eat, drink nor sleep. The fellow had quite disarmed me! On the fourth day I went out to look for him. Went round all the pubs asking for him, but he wasn't to be found anywhere: gone, vanished! 'Not dead, are you, Yemelyan?' I thought to myself. 'Yielded up the ghost under some fence in a drunken stupor maybe and now you're lying there like a piece of rotten wood.' I just dragged myself home, feeling more dead than alive. Made up my mind to go out looking for him again the next day. And all the time I was cursing myself for having let such a helpless fool of a man go off by himself. Very early on the morning of the fifth day (it was a holiday) I heard the door creak. I looked up and saw Yemelyan coming in. His face was gone a bluish colour and his hair was caked in mud, as though he'd been sleeping in the street. Thin as a lath he was. He took off his tattered old coat, sat down beside me on the chest, and looked at me. I was glad to see him, I can tell you, sir, but at the same time I was more cut up than ever. For you see, sir, it's like this: if I had ever done something wrong, I'd have died like a dog sooner than come back. Aye, it's the gospel truth I'm telling you. But Yemelyan came back. And, naturally, it fairly broke my heart to see a man in such a terrible plight. I made much of him, talked kindly to him, comforted him.

"'Well, Yemelyan, my dear old fellow,' I says to him, 'I'm certainly glad to see you back. Had you been a few minutes later.

I'd have gone round the pubs again looking for you. Have you had anything to eat at all?' "

"Yes, thank you, Astafy he says, 'I have.' "

"Come now, are you sure? Here, my dear fellow, here's some cabbage soup left over from yesterday. It's good stuff, had some beef in it. And here's some bread and an onion. Come on, eat it,' I says. It'll do you good.'

"I gave it to him, and saw at once that the poor chap had not tasted food for maybe three days—he was so ravenous! Aye, it was hunger that had driven him to me. Well, I felt real sorry for the poor wretch. My heart overflowed with pity as I looked at him. 'I think,' I says to myself, 'I'd better run out to the pub and get him a drink to cheer him up a little, and let's put an end to all that sorry business. There's not a drop of bitterness left in my heart against you, Yemelyan, old fellow!' So I ran out to the pub and brought back some vodka. 'Here, Yemelyan,' I says, 'come on, let's have a drink, seeing it's a holiday today! Like a drink? It's good for your health.'

"He held out his hand, held it out greedy-like, but stopped before taking the glass. A minute later I saw him take it, lift it to his mouth, and spill some of the drink on his sleeve. He got it as far as his lips, but put it down at once on the table.

"Why, whats the matter, Yemelyan?"

"No, thank you, Astafy, I—er—I don't think I—'

"Don't you want a drink?"

"No, thank you, Astafy, I—er—I— well—I'm not going to—er—drink any more, Astafy.'

"But why not, Yemelyan? Have you given up drink altogether, or is it only today you don't feel like having one?"

"He made no answer. A moment later I noticed that he dropped his head wearily on his hand.

“What’s the matter, Yemelyan? Are you ill?”

“Yes, Astafy. Afraid so.”

“I put him to bed at once. I could see he was in a bad way: his head was burning and he was shivering in a fever. I sat by him all day, and towards night his illness took a turn for the worse. I mixed some vegetable oil and *kvas*, put in some chopped-up spring onions and breadcrumbs, and gave it to him. ‘Come,’ I says, ‘have some of this, Yemelyan. It’ll make you feel better.’ But he shook his head. ‘No, thank you, Astafy,’ he says. ‘If you don’t mind I’d much rather not have any dinner today.’ I made some tea, tired my landlady out preparing all sorts of things for him, but he wouldn’t have anything. ‘Well,’ I says to myself, ‘it certainly looks bad!’ The third morning I went to fetch a doctor. There was one living quite near, Kostopravov his name was. I’d known him when I was in service with the Bossomyagins. Had him in myself when I was ill. The doctor came and had a look at Yemelyan. ‘He’s in a bad way, isn’t he?’ he says. ‘You could have spared yourself the trouble of calling me in. Still,’ he says, ‘I suppose I’d better give him some powders.’ Well, sir, I never gave Yemelyan the powders, for I could see that the doctor himself hadn’t any faith in them. In the meantime the fifth day came.

“Well, sir, there he lay dying before my eyes. I sat in the window with my work in my hands. My landlady was heating the stove. None of us spoke. My heart bled on account of that worthless drunkard, sir. I felt like I was losing my own son. I knew Yemelyan was looking at me all the time. I noticed that the poor fellow had been trying hard since morning to tell me something, but it seemed as if he couldn’t screw up his courage to do it. At last I looked up at him. Oh, the agony in the poor fellow’s eyes, sir! He’d never taken them off me for a moment; but when he saw me looking at him he dropped them quickly.

“‘I say, Astafy. .’

“‘What is it, Yemelyan?’

“‘If you took my old coat to the second-hand market, Astafy, do you think they’d give you a lot for it?’

“‘Well,’ I says, ‘I hardly think they’d offer me a great deal for it, Yemelyan. Three roubles, perhaps.’

“‘But as a matter of fact, sir, if I had taken it, they wouldn’t have given me as much as a penny for it. Most likely they would have laughed in my face for trying to sell them a useless old rag like that. I said it just to comfort the old fellow, seeing what a simpleton he was.

“‘And I was thinking, Astafy, that they might give you ten roubles for it. It’s made of fine cloth, Astafy. They’d give you more than three roubles for a coat made of fine cloth, wouldn’t they?’

“‘Well, I don’t really know, Yemelyan,’ I says, ‘but if you want me to take it, then of course I’ll ask ten roubles for it to begin with.’

“‘Yemelyan was silent for a minute or two; then he called me again.

“‘Astafy’

“‘What is it, Yemelyan?’

“‘Sell my coat when I die. Don’t bury me in it. I’ll be all right without it. It’s a valuable article, Astafy. It might come in very handy for you.’

“‘Well, sir, I can’t tell you how dreadful I felt when he said that! I could see that the end was near. We were silent again. So a whole hour passed. Then I looked at him. He was still staring at me, but when he met my eyes he looked down again.

“‘Want a drink of water, Yemelyan?’

“‘Yes, thank you, Astafy.’



"I gave him some water and he drank it.

"Thank you, Astafy, he says again.

"Is there anything else you'd like, Yemelyan?"

"No, thank you, Astafy, I don't want anything.

Only—'

"Only what, Yemelyan?"

"I—er—'

"What is it, Yemelyan?"

"The riding breeches, Astafy. It was me who-er-took them.'

"Well,' I says, 'I'm sure the Lord will forgive you, you poor fellow. You can die in peace.'

"And feeling a lump coming up to my throat and tears gushing out of my eyes, I turned away for a moment.

"Astafy—'

"I turned round and saw that Yemelyan was trying to say something to me. He was trying desperately to sit up, and his lips were moving soundlessly. All of a sudden he reddened, and looked at me. Then I saw him go pale again, paler and paler, and suddenly he seemed to shrivel up. His head fell back, he drew one last breath, and gave up his soul to his Maker."

## The Christmas Tree And A Wedding

*From the Memoirs of an Unknown*

The other day I saw a wedding. But no! I'd better tell you about the Christmas tree. The wedding was all right; I liked it very much, but the other affair was much better. I don't know how it was that, looking at the wedding, I should have remembered the Christmas tree. It happened like this. Exactly five years ago, on New Year's Eve, I was invited to a children's party. The person who had invited me was a well-known business man, a man of good connections, a man with an influential circle of acquaintances, a man who knew all there was to know about pulling strings, so that there was good reason to believe that the children's party was merely an excuse for the parents to get together and have a talk about other interesting matters in an innocent, casual, unpremeditated sort of way. I was a stranger there; I had no interesting matters to discuss, and for that reason I spent the evening more or less as I pleased. There was another man there who, too, apparently had neither friends nor relations and who, like me, just happened to be present on that happy family occasion. He was the first to catch my eye—a tall, spare man, very serious, very decently dressed. But it was quite evident that he was in no mood for fun or happy family occasions. Indeed, whenever he found himself alone in some corner he left off smiling at once and knit his bushy, black brows. Apart from our host, he did not know a single soul at the party. One could see that he was terribly bored, but he kept up valiantly and to the bitter end the part of a perfectly happy man who was having a really good time. I found out afterwards that he was from the

provinces and had come up to town on some extremely important and highly complicated business. He had brought a letter of introduction to our host who extended his patronage to him by no means *con amore*, and who invited him to his children's party out of mere courtesy. There were no card games, no one offered him a cigar, no one engaged him in conversation, having, perhaps, recognised at a distance the sort of awkward customer he was, and for that reason the poor fellow, not knowing what to do with his hands, was forced to spend the whole evening stroking his whiskers. His whiskers were indeed extremely handsome. But he stroked them with such enthusiasm that one could not help feeling that his whiskers were brought into the world first, and the gentleman himself was only afterwards attached to them in order to stroke them.

In addition to this odd character who took part in this extraordinary manner in the family celebration of our host (the proud father of five strapping boys), there was another man in the room who aroused my curiosity. But he was a person of quite a different sort. He was a man of consequence. His name was Julian Mastakovich. From the first glance it was obvious that he was on the same terms with our host as our host was with the gentleman who was stroking his whiskers. Our host and hostess overwhelmed him with compliments, danced attendance on him, offered him drinks, fawned upon him, took their visitors up to him to be introduced, but did not take him to be introduced to anybody. I noticed the glint of a tear in our host's eye when Julian Mastakovich observed apropos of the party that he did not often spend his time so pleasantly. I don't know why, but I felt overawed in the presence of so important a personage and, consequently, having admired the children, I withdrew to a small drawing-room, which was completely deserted, and sat down in

the arbour of flowers arranged by our hostess which occupied almost half the room.

All the children were incredibly sweet and quite determined not to behave like *grown—ups* in spite of the admonitions of their fond mothers and governesses. They stripped the Christmas tree to the last sweetmeat in a twinkling and even found time to break half the toys before they knew what toy was meant for which. One black-eyed, curly-headed boy, who kept trying to shoot me with his wooden gun, was particularly lovely to look at. But it was his sister who attracted more attention than any other child at the party. She was a girl of eleven, pretty as a picture, very quiet, pale, dreamy, with a pair of large, pensive, prominent eyes. The children must have done something to hurt her feelings, for she went away to the same drawing-room in which I was sitting and busied herself in a corner—with her doll. The visitors respectfully pointed out a wealthy government contractor, her father, and I heard someone saying in a whisper that he had already set aside three hundred thousand roubles for her dowry. I turned round to see who was so interested in such a circumstance, and my glance fell on Julian Mastakovich, who, with his hands behind his back and his head slightly inclined to one side, seemed to listen with rapt attention to the idle talk of these people. Afterwards I could not help admiring the wisdom of our hosts in the distribution of the children's presents. The little girl who already had a portion of three hundred thousand roubles received the most expensive doll. There followed presents which decreased in value in accordance with the decrease in the social rank of the parents of all these happy children. Finally, the last child to receive a present, a small, thin, freckled, red-haired little boy of ten, got nothing but a book of stories with descriptions of the grandeur of nature, the tears shed under the

influence of strong emotion, etc., without pictures or even a tail-piece. He was the son of a poor widow, the governess of our host's children, a completely cowed and scared little boy. He was dressed in a jacket of cheap material. Having received his book, he wandered round the other toys for a long time. He wanted terribly to play with the other children, but he did not dare: one could see that he already felt and understood his position. I am very fond of watching children. I find their first manifestation of independence most fascinating. I noticed that the red-haired boy was so tempted by the expensive toys of the other children, and especially by the theatre, in which he wanted very badly to take some part, that he did not hesitate to do a bit of cringing. He smiled and ingratiated himself with the other children, he gave away his apple to a pasty-faced boy who already had a large number of presents tied up in a handkerchief, and he even went so far as to give a ride on his back to another boy so as not to be driven away from the theatre. But a minute later some scamp of a boy gave him a really good thrashing. The little boy did not dare to cry. His mother, the governess, immediately intervened and told him not to interfere with the games of the other children. The child went away into the same drawing-room where the little girl was playing by herself. She made friends with him, and the two set about dressing the expensive doll, in which occupation they soon became intently absorbed.

I had been sitting there for about half an hour in the ivy arbour and had almost fallen asleep, as I listened to the brisk chatter of the red-haired boy and the beautiful little girl with the dowry of three hundred thousand, both so busy with their doll, when Julian Mastakovich suddenly walked into the room. He had taken advantage of a rather disgraceful scene caused by a quarrel among the children to escape unnoticed from the ball-



room. I noticed that only a minute ago he had been talking very animatedly to the father of the future heiress, to whom he had just been introduced, about the superiority of some branch of public service over another. Now he stood absorbed in meditation and seemed to be doing a sum on his fingers.

"Three hundred. . . three hundred. . ." he was whispering. "Eleven . . . twelve . . . thirteen . ." he went on counting "Sixteen—five years! Suppose it's at four per cent—that'll make twelve, five times twelve is sixty, and the interest on the sixty... well, say, in five years it'll be four hundred. Yes, that's it! . . . But, good Lord, he won't invest it at four per cent, not that blackguard! More likely at eight or ten per cent. Well, then, say, five hundred, yes, five hundred thousand at least, that's certain. Of course, there may be something over for her trousseau. . . h'm. . ."

He stopped meditating, blew his nose and was about to go out of the room when his glance suddenly fell on the little girl and he stopped dead. He did not see me behind the pots of greenery. He appeared to me to be in a state of great agitation. Whether it was the sum he had been doing that had so wrought upon his imagination, or whether it was something else, I could not tell, but he kept rubbing his hands and could not stand still for a moment. This excitement increased to *nec plus ultra* when he stopped and threw another determined glance on the future heiress. He was about to walk up to her, but first threw a furtive look round the room. Then he began approaching the child on tiptoe as though feeling guilty of something. He went up to her with a little insinuating smile and kissed her on the head. The little girl, not expecting this attack, uttered a frightened cry.

"And what are you doing here, my sweet child?" he asked in a whisper, throwing another furtive look round him and pat-



ting the little girl's cheek.

"We're playing. . ."

"Oh? With him?" Julian Mastakovich looked askance at the little boy. "Run away to the ballroom, there's a good boy," he said to him.

The boy stared at him, but made no answer. Julian Mastakovich again looked around furtively and again bent down to the little girl.

"What have you got there, my sweet child?" he asked. "A dolly?"

"A dolly," the little girl answered, frowning and a little frightened.

"A dolly. . . . And do you know, my sweet child, what your dolly is made of?"

"No, sir," the girl replied in a whisper, hanging her head.

"Why, it's made of rags, darling," and looking sternly at the little boy, Julian Mastakovich added, "Go to your playmates in the ballroom, boy!"

The boy and girl frowned and clutched at each other. They did not want to be separated.

"And do you know why they gave you that doll?" asked Julian Mastakovich, lowering his voice more and more.

"No, sir."

"Because you've been a sweet and well-behaved child all the week."

Julian Mastakovich, now in a ferment of excitement, threw a careful glance round the room, and lowering his voice more and more, asked in a scarcely audible whisper, his voice broken with emotion and impatience—

"And do you promise to love me, my little darling, when I come and see your mummy and daddy?"

Saying this, Julian Mastakovich tried once more to kiss "the little darling," but the red-haired boy, seeing that she was on the point of bursting into tears, seized her hand and began to whimper from sympathy with her. Julian Mastakovich got angry in good earnest.

"Go away, go away from here!" he said to the boy. "Go on, go to your playmates in the ballroom!"

"No, no," cried the little girl. "You go away! Leave him alone, leave him alone, will you?" she said, almost in tears.

Someone made a noise at the door. Julian Mastakovich took fright and drew himself up majestically to his full height. But the red-haired boy, who was even more frightened than Julian Mastakovich, abandoned the girl and, keeping close to the wall, slunk out of the drawing-room into the dining-room. To avoid suspicion, Julian Mastakovich, too, went into the dining-room. He was red as a lobster, and, glancing into the looking-glass, seemed to be ashamed of himself. I expect he was sorry for his excitement and impatience. It was of course possible that he was so taken aback at the very beginning by the sum he was doing on his fingers, that he was so tempted and inspired by it, that in spite of all his importance and dignity he had decided to act like a hot-headed youth and take the object of his desires by storm, without reflecting that the object of his desires could not become a real object for at least another five years. I followed the worthy gentleman into the dining-room and there I beheld a strange sight. Julian Mastakovich, flushed with vexation and anger, was bullying the red-haired boy, who, retreating further and further from him, did not know where to run in his terror.

"Go away, you beastly little beggar, go away! What are you doing here? Stealing fruit, are you? Stealing fruit, eh? Off with you, you naughty boy! Get out, you snivelling little idiot! Away

to your playmates! Go!"

The terrified little boy, in a frantic effort to escape his pursuer, tried to crawl under the table. But Julian Mastakovich, beside himself with fury, took out his large cambric handkerchief and started lashing out with it viciously in an attempt to force the child, who had grown as quiet as a mouse, to come out from under the table. It should be recorded here that Julian Mastakovich was somewhat corpulent. He was a sleek, ruddy-cheeked, solidly built, paunchy man, with fat thighs, in a word, strong as a horse, as they say, and round as a nut. He was perspiring, panting, and getting terribly red in the face. At last he got almost mad with rage, so great was his indignation and perhaps—who knows? — jealousy. I burst out laughing. Julian Mastakovich turned round and, in spite of all his self-importance, was thrown into utter confusion. At that moment our host walked in from the opposite door. The young lad crawled out from under the table and wiped his elbows and knees. Julian Mastakovich hastened to put the handkerchief, which he was holding by one end, to his nose.

Our host regarded the three of us with a somewhat puzzled expression; but as a man of experience who took a serious view of life, he immediately availed himself of the opportunity of catching his visitor by himself.

"This is the boy, sir," he said, pointing at the red-haired boy, "I spoke to you about. . ."

"I beg your pardon," said Julian Mastakovich who had not entirely recovered himself.

"The son of my children's governess, sir," our host went on in the tone of a man asking for a favour. "She's a woman in rather poor circumstances, sir, the widow of a very honest civil servant, and that's why I thought you might..."

"No, no, no," Julian Mastakovich cried quickly. "I'm sorry,

sir, but it's quite out of the question. I've made inquiries and there is no vacancy, and even if there had been one, there are a dozen candidates waiting for it who have a better claim than he. Sorry, sir. Very sorry."

"A pity," said our host, "he's such a quiet, inoffensive little boy."

"A very mischievous boy, sir, from what I've seen of him," replied Julian Mastakovich with a convulsive twist of his lips. "Get along, boy! What are you waiting for? Go and join your playmates!" he said, addressing the boy.

Here it seemed he could not keep it up any longer and glanced at me out of the corner of one eye. I, too, was not able to keep it up and laughed straight in his face. Julian Mastakovich at once turned away and asked our host in a voice loud enough for me to hear who that strange young man was. They began to exchange whispered confidences and left the room. Afterwards I saw Julian Mastakovich shaking his head incredulously as he listened to our host.

Having laughed to my heart's content, I returned to the ballroom. There the great man, surrounded by fathers and mothers, including our host and hostess, was holding forth very warmly about something to a lady he had just been introduced to. The lady was holding by the hand the little girl with whom Julian Mastakovich had had the scene in the drawing-room about ten minutes before. Now he waxed ecstatic in his praises of the beauty, talents, grace, and good breeding of the sweet child. He quite undisguisedly grovelled before the mother, who listened to him almost with tears of rapture. The father's lips were smiling. Our host was delighted at these manifestations of universal joy. Even the guests were deeply sympathetic; even the children were told to stop playing so as not to interfere with the conversation:

the air itself was charged with reverence. I heard afterwards how the dear mother of the charming little girl, touched to the bottom of her heart, begged Julian Mastakovich to be so kind as to honour her house with the presence of his inestimable person; how Julian Mastakovich accepted her invitation with unfeigned enthusiasm; and how later on the guests, going their several ways as demanded by the rules of propriety and decorum, vied with each other in paying the most touching compliments to the contractor, the contractor's wife, the little girl, and, last but not least, Julian Mastakovich.

"Is that gentleman married?" I asked in a rather loud voice of one of my acquaintances who was standing nearest to Julian Mastakovich.

Julian Mastakovich threw a vindictive and searching glance at me.

"No," replied my acquaintance, shocked by my breach of good manners, a breach which, I must say, I had committed deliberately.

As I was passing a certain church a few days ago, I was surprised to see a large crowd and a great number of carriages in front of it. Everyone around me was talking about a wedding. The day was cloudy; it was beginning to sleet. I followed the crowd into the church and there I saw the bridegroom. He was a small, rotund, sleek, paunchy little man, highly adorned. He never sat still, was in every part of the church at once, attending to everything and issuing orders. At last a rumour passed through the crowd that the bride had arrived. I pushed my way through the people and saw an extraordinarily beautiful girl for whom the spring-tide of life had scarcely begun. But the beautiful girl was sad and pale. She looked about her without interest; I even fan-

cied that her eyes were red with recent tears. The classic severity of every feature of her face added a touch of solemn dignity to her beauty. And through this severity and dignity, through this sadness, a faint glimmer of the first innocent bloom of childhood could still be caught. The sensation I got was of something incredibly naive, of something that had not yet had time to set, of something young and fresh, and—of something, too, that seemed to be mutely beseeching for mercy.

People were saying that she was only just sixteen. Looking closely at the bridegroom, I recognised in a flash Julian Mastakovich. I looked at her. Dear God!...

I began to make my way quickly to the door. In the crowd they were saying that the bride was an heiress, that her dowry was worth five hundred thousand, not to mention the thousands that must have been spent on her trousseau....

"He got his sum right, by Jove," I thought as I elbowed my way into the street.



## The Peasant Marey

It was Easter Monday. The air was warm, the sky blue, the sun high, “warm” and bright, but I was plunged in gloom. I wandered aimlessly behind the barracks in the prison yard, looked at the palings of the strong prison fence, counting them mechanically, though I did not particularly want to count them, but doing it more out of habit than anything else. It was the second day of “holidays” in prison. The convicts were not taken out to work, lots of them were drunk, cursing and quarrelling broke out every minute in different corners of the prison. Disgusting, coarse songs; groups of convicts playing cards under the bunks; several convicts who had run amok and had been dealt with summarily by their own comrades, were lying half dead on the bunks, covered with sheep skins, until they should recover consciousness; the knives that had already been drawn several times—all this had so harrowing an effect on me during the two days of holidays that it made me ill. I could never bear without disgust the wild orgies of the common people, and here in this place this was specially true. On such days even the officials never looked into the prison, carried out no searches, did not look for drinks, realising that once a year even these outcasts had to be given a chance of enjoying themselves and that otherwise things would be much worse. At last blind fury blazed up in my heart. I met the Pole, M—ski,<sup>1</sup> one of the political prisoners. He gave me a black look, with flashing eyes and trembling lips. “*Je hais ces*

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<sup>1</sup> O. Miretski, who was serving a prison sentence with Dostoevsky.

*brigands!*" he hissed at me in an undertone and walked past me. I went back to the barracks, although I had rushed out of them like a madman only a quarter of an hour before, when six strong peasants had hurled themselves on the drunken Tartar Gazin in an attempt to quieten him and had begun beating him. They beat him senselessly—a camel might have been killed by such blows. But they knew that it was not easy to kill this Hercules, and they beat him therefore without any qualms. Now, on my return, I noticed Gazin lying unconscious and without any sign of life on a bunk in a corner at the other end of the barracks; he lay covered with a sheepskin, and they all passed by him in silence, knowing very well that if the man was unlucky he might die from a beating like that. I made my way to my place opposite the window with the iron bars and lay on my back with my eyes closed and my hands behind my head. I liked to lie like that: no one would bother a sleeping man, and meanwhile one could dream and think. But I found it difficult to dream: my heart was beating uneasily and M—ski's words were still echoing in my ears: "*Je hais ces brigands!*" However, why dwell on these scenes; I sometimes even now dream of those times at night, and none of my dreams is more agonising. Perhaps it will be noticed that to this day I have hardly ever spoken in print of my life in prison; *The House of the Dead* I wrote fifteen years ago in the person of a fictitious character who was supposed to have killed his wife. I may add, incidentally, just as an interesting detail, that many people have thought and have been maintaining ever since the publication of that book of mine, that I was sent to Siberia for the murder of my wife.

By and by I did forget my surroundings and became imperceptibly lost in memories. During the four years of my imprisonment I was continually recalling my past and seemed in my

memories to live my former life all over again. These memories cropped up by themselves; I seldom evoked them consciously. It would begin from some point, some imperceptible feature, which then grew little by little into a complete picture, into some clear-cut and vivid impression. I used to analyse those impressions, adding new touches to an event that had happened long ago, and, above all, correcting it, correcting it incessantly, and that constituted my chief amusement. This time I for some reason suddenly remembered one fleeting instant in my early childhood when I was only nine years old—an instant that I seemed to have completely forgotten; but at that time I was particularly fond of memories of my early childhood. I remembered an August day in our village; a dry, bright day, though rather cold and windy; summer was drawing to a close, and we should soon have to leave for Moscow and again have to spend all winter over the boring French lessons, and I was so sorry to leave the country. I walked past the threshing floors and, going down a ravine, climbed up into the dense thicket of bushes which stretched from the other side of the ravine to the wood. I got amongst the bushes, and I could hear not very far away, about thirty yards perhaps, a peasant ploughing by himself on a clearing. I knew he was ploughing up the steep slope of a hill. The horse must have found it very hard going, for from time to time I heard the peasant's call from a distance: "Gee up! Gee up!" I knew almost all our peasants, but I did not know which of them was ploughing now, nor did it really matter to me who it was because I was occupied with my own affairs—I too was busy, breaking off a switch from a hazel-tree to strike frogs with; hazel twigs are very lovely, but they are also very brittle, much more brittle than birch twigs. I was also interested in beetles and other insects, and I was collecting them; some of them were very beautiful. I also

liked the small quick red and yellow lizards with black spots, but I was afraid of snakes. However, there were many fewer snakes than lizards. There were not many mushrooms there; to get mushrooms one had to go to the birch wood, and I was about to go there. And there was nothing in the world I loved so much as the wood with its mushrooms and wild berries, its beetles and its birds, its hedgehogs and squirrels, and its damp smell of rotted leaves. And even as I write this I can smell the fragrance of our birch wood: these impressions remain with you for your whole life. Suddenly amid the dead silence I heard clearly and distinctly the shout, "Wolf! Wolf!" I uttered a shriek and, panic-stricken, screamed at the top of my voice and rushed out to the clearing straight to the ploughing peasant.

It was our peasant Marey. I do not know if there is such a name, but everybody called him Marey. He was a peasant of about fifty, thick-set and over medium height, with a large, grizzled, dark-brown beard. I knew him, but till that day I had scarcely ever spoken to him. When he heard my cry, he even stopped his old mare, and when, unable to stop myself I clutched at his wooden plough with one hand and at his sleeve with the other, he saw how terrified I was.

"There's a wolf there!" I cried, breathless.

He threw up his head and looked round involuntarily, for a moment almost believing me.

"Where's the wolf?"

"Someone shouted—shouted just now 'Wolf! Wolf!'" I stammered.

"There, there! There are no wolves hereabouts," he murmured, trying to calm me. "You've been dreaming, sonny. Who ever heard of wolves in these parts?"

But I was trembling all over and I was still clutching at his

smock, and I suppose I must have been very pale. He looked at me with a worried smile, evidently anxious and troubled about me.

"Dear, dear, how frightened you are," he said, shaking his head. "Don't be frightened, sonny. Oh, you poor thing, you! There, there."

He stretched out his hand and suddenly stroked my cheek.

"There now! Christ be with you, cross yourself, there's a good lad!"

But I did not cross myself; the corners of my mouth were still twitching, and that seemed to strike him particularly. He quietly stretched out his thick finger with its black nail, smeared with earth, and gently touched my trembling lips.

"Dear, oh dear," he smiled at me with a slow motherly sort of smile, "Lord, how frightened he is, the poor lad!"

I realised at last that there was no wolf and that I had imagined the shout, "Wolf! Wolf!" The shout, though, was very clear and distinct, but such shouts (and not only about wolves) I had imagined once or twice before, and I knew it. (I grew out of these hallucinations a few years later.)

"Well, I'll go now," I said, looking up at him, questioningly and shyly.

"Run along, run along, son, I'll be a watching you," he said, adding, "Don't you worry, I shan't let the wolf get you!" and he smiled at me with the same motherly smile. "Well, Christ be with you. Run along, run along, sonny," and he made the sign of the cross over me, and then crossed himself too.

I walked away, looking back anxiously every few yards. While I was walking away, Marey stood still with his mare and looked after me, nodding his head at me every time I looked round. As a matter of fact, I was a little ashamed of myself for



having let him see how frightened I was, but I was still very much afraid of the wolf as I was walking away till I climbed up the steep side of the ravine and came to the first threshing barn. There my terror left me completely, and our watchdog Volchok suddenly appeared out of nowhere and rushed at me. With Volchok at my side I completely recovered my spirits and turned round to Marey for the last time. I could no longer see his face clearly, but I felt that he was still nodding and smiling tenderly at me. I waved to him and he waved back to me and started his mare.

"Gee up!" I heard his call in the distance again, and the mare pulled at the wooden plough once more.

All this came back to me all at once, I don't know why, but with an amazing accuracy of detail. I suddenly came to and sat up on my bunk and, I remember, I could still feel the gentle smile of memory on my lips. For another minute I went on recalling that incident from my childhood.

When I returned home from Marey that day I did not tell anybody about my "adventure." It was not much of an adventure, anyway. And, besides, I soon forgot all about Marey. Whenever I happened to come across him now and then, I never spoke to him either about the wolf or anything else, and now twenty years later in Siberia I suddenly remembered this meeting so distinctly that not a single detail of it was lost, which means of course that it must have been hidden in my mind without my knowing it, of itself and without any effort on my part, and came back to me suddenly when it was wanted. I remembered the tender, motherly smile of that serf, the way he made the sign of the cross over me and crossed himself, the way he nodded at me. "Lord, how afeared he is, the poor lad!" And particularly that thick finger of his, smeared with earth, with which he touched my twitching lips so gently and with such shy tenderness. No doubt, anyone would



have done his best to calm a child, but something quite different seemed to have happened during that solitary meeting; and if I had been his own son, he could not have looked at me with eyes shining with brighter love. And who compelled him to look like that? He was one of our serfs, a peasant who was our property, and after all I was the son of his master. No one would have known that he had been so good to me, and no one would have rewarded him for it. Did he really love little children as much as that? There are such people, no doubt. Our meeting took place in a secluded spot, in a deserted field, and only God perhaps saw from above with what profound and enlightened human feeling, and with what delicate, almost womanly, tenderness the heart of a coarse, savagely ignorant Russian serf was filled, a serf who at the time neither expected nor dreamt of his emancipation.

Tell me, was not this what Konstantin Akaskov perhaps meant when he spoke of the high degree of culture of our people?

And so when I got off the bunk and looked round, I suddenly felt I remember, that I could look at these unhappy creatures with quite different eyes, and that suddenly by some miracle all hatred and anger had vanished from my heart. I walked round the prison peering into the faces I came across. That rascal of a peasant with his shaven head and branded face, yelling his hoarse drunken song at the top of his voice—why, he, too, may be the same sort of peasant as Marey: I cannot possibly look into his heart, can I? That evening I again met M—ski. Poor man! He could have no memories about Marey or peasants like him and he could have no other opinion of these people except, "*Je hais ces brigands!*" Yes, it was much harder for those Poles than for us!

Ivan Turgenev



## The Jew

"Tell us a story, colonel," we said at last to Nikolai Ilyitch. The colonel smiled, puffed out a coil of tobacco smoke between his moustaches, passed his hand over his grey hair, looked at us and considered. We all had the greatest liking and respect for Nikolai Ilyitch, for his good-heartedness, common sense, and kindly indulgence to us young fellows. He was a tall, broad-shouldered, stoutly-built man; his dark face, "one of the splendid Russian faces," straightforward, clever glance, gentle smile, manly and mellow voice—everything about him pleased and attracted one.

"All right, listen then," he began.

It happened in 1813, before Dantzig. I was then in the E—— regiment of cuirassiers, and had just, I recollect, been promoted to be a cornet. It is an exhilarating occupation—fighting; and marching too is good enough in its way, but it is fearfully slow in a besieging army. There one sits the whole blessed day within some sort of entrenchment, under a tent, on mud or straw, playing cards from morning till night. Perhaps, from simple boredom, one goes out to watch the bombs and redhot bullets flying.

At first the French kept us amused with sorties, but they quickly subsided. We soon got sick of foraging expeditions too; we were overcome, in fact, by such deadly dulness that we were ready to howl for sheer ennui. I was not more than nineteen then: I was a healthy young fellow, fresh as a daisy, thought of nothing but getting all the fun I could out of the French . . . and in other ways too . . . you understand what I mean . . . and this is what

happened. Having nothing to do, I fell to gambling. All of a sudden, after dreadful losses, my luck turned, and towards morning (we used to play at night) I had won an immense amount. Exhausted and sleepy, I came out into the fresh air, and sat down on a mound. It was a splendid, calm morning; the long lines of our fortifications were lost in the mist; I gazed till I was weary, and then began to doze where I was sitting.

A discreet cough woke me: I opened my eyes, and saw standing before me a Jew, a man of forty, wearing a long-skirted grey wrapper, slippers, and a black smoking-cap. This Jew, whose name was Girshel, was continually hanging about our camp, offering his services as an agent, getting us wine, provisions, and other such trifles. He was a thinnish, red-haired, little man, marked with smallpox; he blinked incessantly with his diminutive little eyes, which were reddish too; he had a long crooked nose, and was always coughing.

He began fidgeting about me, bowing obsequiously.

"Well, what do you want?" I asked him at last.

"Oh, I only—I've only come, sir, to know if I can be of use to your honour in some way . . ."

"I don't want you; you can go."

"At your honour's service, as you desire. . . . I thought there might be, sir, something . . ."

"You bother me; go along, I tell you."

"Certainly, sir, certainly. But your honour must permit me to congratulate you on your success. . . ."

"Why, how did you know?"

"Oh, I know, to be sure I do. . . . An immense sum . . . immense. . . . Oh! how immense . . ."

Girshel spread out his fingers and wagged his head.

"But what's the use of talking," I said peevishly; "what the

devil's the good of money here? "

"Oh! don't say that, your honour; ay, ay, don't say so. Money's a capital thing; always of use; you can get anything for money, your honour; anything! anything! Only say the word to the agent, he'll get you anything, your honour, anything! anything!"

"Don't tell lies, Jew."

"Ay! ay!" repeated Girshel, shaking his side-locks. "Your honour doesn't believe me. . . . Ay . . . ay. . . ." The Jew closed his eyes and slowly wagged his head to right and to left. . . . "Oh, I know what his honour the officer would like. . . . I know. . . to be sure I do!"

The Jew assumed an exceedingly knowing leer.

"Really!"

The Jew glanced round timorously, then bent over to me.

"Such a lovely creature, your honour, lovely! . . ." Girshel again closed his eyes and shot out his lips.

"Your honour, you've only to say the word . . . you shall see for yourself . . . whatever I say now, you'll hear . . . but you won't believe . . . better tell me to show you . . . that's the thing, that's the thing!"

I did not speak; I gazed at the Jew.

"Well, all right then; well then, very good; so I'll show you then . . . ."

Thereupon Girshel laughed and slapped me lightly on the shoulder, but skipped back at once as though he had been scalded.

"But, your honour, how about a trifle in advance?"

"But you're taking me in, and will show me some scare-crow? ."

"Ay, ay, what a thing to say!" the Jew pronounced with unusual warmth, waving his hands about. "How can you! Why... if so, your honour, you order me to be given five hundred . . . four



hundred and fifty lashes," he added hurriedly. . . . "You give orders—"

At that moment one of my comrades lifted the edge of his tent and called me by name. I got up hurriedly and flung the Jew a gold coin.

"This evening, this evening," he muttered after me. I must confess, my friends, I looked forward to the evening with some impatience. That very day the French made a sortie; our regiment marched to the attack. The evening came on; we sat round the fires . . . the soldiers cooked porridge. My comrades talked. I lay on my cloak, drank tea, and listened to my comrades' stories. They suggested a game of cards—I refused to take part in it. I felt excited. Gradually the officers dispersed to their tents; the fires began to die down; the soldiers too dispersed, or went to sleep on the spot; everything was still. I did not get up. My orderly squatted on his heels before the fire, and was beginning to nod. I sent him away. Soon the whole camp was hushed. The sentries were relieved. I still lay there, as if waiting for something. The stars peeped out. The night came on. A long while I watched the dying flame. . . . The last fire went out. "The damned Jew was taking me in," I thought angrily, and was just going to get up.

"Your honour, . . ." a trembling voice whispered close to my ear.

I looked round: Girshel. He was very pale, he stammered, and whispered something.

"Let's go to your tent, sir."

I got up and followed him. The Jew shrank into himself, and stepped warily over the short, damp grass. I observed on one side a motionless, muffled-up figure. The Jew beckoned to her—she went up to him. He whispered to her, turned to me, nodded his

head several times, and we all three went into the tent. Ridiculous to relate, I was breathless.

"You see, your honour," the Jew whispered with an effort, "you see. She's a little frightened at the moment, she's frightened; but I've told her his honour the officer's a good man, a splendid man. . . . Don't be frightened, don't be frightened," he went on—"don't be frightened. . . ."

The muffled-up figure did not stir. I was myself in a state of dreadful confusion, and didn't know what to say. Girshel too was fidgeting restlessly, and gesticulating in a strange way. . . .

"Any way," I said to him, "you get out. . . ." Unwillingly, as it seemed, Girshel obeyed.

I went up to the muffled-up figure, and gently took the dark hood off her head. There was a conflagration in Dantzic: by the faint, reddish, flickering glow of the distant fire I saw the pale face of a young Jewess. Her beauty astounded me. I stood facing her, and gazed at her in silence. She did not raise her eyes. A slight rustle made me look round. Girshel was cautiously poking his head in under the edge of the tent. I waved my hand at him angrily. . . . he vanished.

"What's your name?" I said at last.

"Sara," she answered, and for one instant I caught in the darkness the gleam of the whites of her large, long-shaped eyes and little, even, flashing teeth.

I snatched up two leather cushions, flung them on the ground, and asked her to sit down. She slipped off her shawl, and sat down. She was wearing a short Cossack jacket, open in front, with round, chased silver buttons, and full sleeves. Her thick black hair was coiled twice round her little head. I sat down beside her and took her dark, slender hand. She resisted a little, but seemed afraid to look at me, and there was a catch in her

breath. I admired her Oriental profile, and timidly pressed her cold, shaking fingers.

"Do you know Russian?"

"Yes . . . a little."

"And do you like Russians?"

"Yes, I like them."

"Then, you like me too?"

"Yes, I like you."

I tried to put my arm round her, but she moved away quickly...

"No, no, please, sir, please . . . ."

"Oh, all right; look at me, any way." She let her black, piercing eyes rest upon me, and at once turned away with a smile, and blushed.

I kissed her hand ardently. She peeped at me from under her eyelids and softly laughed.

"What is it?"

She hid her face in her sleeve and laughed more than before.

Girshel showed himself at the entrance of the tent and shook his finger at her. She ceased laughing.

"Go away!" I whispered to him through my teeth; "you make me sick!"

Girshel did not go away.

I took a handful of gold pieces out of my trunk, stuffed them in his hand and pushed him out.

"Your honour, me too . . ." she said.

I dropped several gold coins on her lap; she pounced on them like a cat.

"Well, now I must have a kiss."

"No, please, please," she faltered in a frightened and beseeching voice.

"What are you frightened of?"

"I'm afraid."

"Oh, nonsense. . . ."

"No, please."

She looked timidly at me, put her head a little on one side and clasped her hands. I let her alone.

"If you like . . . here," she said after a brief silence, and she raised her hand to my lips. With no great eagerness, I kissed it. Sara laughed again.

My blood was boiling. I was annoyed with myself and did not know what to do. Really, I thought at last, what a fool I am.

I turned to her again.

"Sara, listen, I'm in love with you."

"I know."

"You know? And you're not angry? And do you like me too?"

Sara shook her head.

"No. answer me properly."

"Well, show yourself," she said.

I bent down to her. Sara laid her hands on my shoulders, began scrutinising my face, frowned, smiled. . . . I could not contain myself, and gave her a rapid kiss on her cheek. She jumped up and in one bound was at the entrance of the tent.

"Come, what a shy thing you are!"

She did not speak and did not stir.

"Come here to me. . . ."

"No, sir, good-bye. Another time."

Girshel again thrust in his curly head, and said a couple of words to her: she bent down and glided away, like a snake.

I ran out of the tent in pursuit of her, but could not get another glimpse of her nor of Girshel.

The whole night long I could not sleep a wink. The next night we were sitting in the tent of our captain; I was playing, but with

no great zest. My orderly came in.

"Some one's asking for you, your honour."

"Who is it?"

"A Jew."

"Can it be Girshel?" I wondered. I waited till the end of the rubber, got up and went out. Yes, it was so; I saw Girshel.

"Well," he questioned me with an ingratiating smile, "your honour, are you satisfied?"

"Ah, you ——!" (Here the colonel glanced round. "No ladies present, I believe. . . . Well, never mind, any way.") "Ah, bless you!" I responded, "so you're making fun of me, are you?"

"How so?"

"How so, indeed! What a question!"

"Ay, ay, your honour, you're too bad," Girshel said reproachfully, but never ceasing smiling. "The girl is young and modest.... You frightened her, indeed, you did."

"Queer sort of modesty! why did she take money, then?"

"Why, what then? If one's given money, why not take it, sir?"

"I say, Girshel, let her come again, and I'll let you off . . . only, please, don't show your stupid phiz inside my tent, and leave us in peace; do you hear?"

Girshel's eyes sparkled.

"What do you say? You like her?" "Well, yes."

"She's a lovely creature! there's not another such anywhere. And have you something for me now?"

"Yes, here, only listen; fair play is better than gold. Bring her and then go to the devil. I'll escort her home myself." "Oh, no, sir, no, that's impossible, sir," the Jew rejoined hurriedly. "Ay, ay, that's impossible. I'll walk about near the tent, your honour, if you like; I'll . . . I'll go away, your honour, if you like, a little.... I'm ready to do your honour a servnce. . . . I'll move

away . . . to be sure, I will."

"Well, mind you do. . . . And bring her, do you hear?"

"Eh, but she's a beauty, your honour, eh? your honour, a beauty, eh?"

Girshel bent down and peeped into my eyes.

"She's good-looking."

"Well, then, give me another gold piece."

I threw him a coin; we parted.

The day passed at last. The night came on. I had been sitting for a long while alone in my tent. It was dark outside. It struck two in the town. I was beginning to curse the Jew. . . . Suddenly Sara came in, alone. I jumped up took her in my arms . . . put my lips to her face. . . . It was cold as ice. I could scarcely distinguish her features. . . . I made her sit down, knelt down before her, took her hands, touched her waist. . . . She did not speak, did not stir, and suddenly she broke into loud, convulsive sobbing. I tried in vain to soothe her, to persuade her. . . . She wept in torrents. . . . I caressed her, wiped her tears ; as before, she did not resist, made no answer to my questions and wept—wept, like a waterfall. I felt a pang at my heart; I got up and went out of the tent.

Girshel seemed to pop up out of the earth before me.

"Girshel," I said to him, "here's the money I promised you. Take Sara away."

The Jew at once rushed up to her. She left off weeping, and clutched hold of him.

"Good-bye, Sara," I said to her. "God bless you, good-bye. We'll see each other again some other time."

Girshel was silent and bowed humbly. Sara bent down, took my hand and pressed it to her lips; I turned away. . . .

For five or six days, my friends, I kept thinking of my Jewess.



Girshel did not make his appearance, and no one had seen him in the camp. I slept rather badly at nights; I was continually haunted by wet, black eyes, and long eyelashes; my lips could not forget the touch of her cheek, smooth and fresh as a downy plum. I was sent out with a foraging party to a village some distance away. While my soldiers were ransacking the houses, I remained in the street, and did not dismount from my horse. Suddenly some one caught hold of my foot. . . .

"Mercy on us, Sara!"

She was pale and excited.

"Your honour . . . help us, save us, your soldiers are insulting us. . . . Your honour. . . ."

She recognised me and flushed red.

"Why, do you live here?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

Sara pointed to a little, old house. I set spurs to my horse and galloped up. In the yard of the little house an ugly and tattered Jewess was trying to tear out of the hands of my long sergeant, Siliavka, three hens and a duck. He was holding his booty above his head, laughing; the hens clucked and the duck quacked. . .

Two other cuirassiers were loading their horses with hay, straw, and sacks of flour. Inside the house I heard shouts and oaths in Little-Russian. . . . I called to my men and told them to leave the Jews alone, not to take anything from them. The soldiers obeyed, the sergeant got on his grey mare, Proserpina, or, as he called her, "Prozherpila," and rode after me into the street.

"Well," I said to Sara, "are you pleased with me?"

She looked at me with a smile.

"What has become of you all this time?"

She dropped her eyes.

"I will come to you tomorrow."

"In the evening?"

"No, sir, in the morning."

"Mind you do, don't deceive me."

"No . . . no, I won't."

I looked greedily at her. By daylight she seemed to me handsomer than ever. I remember I was particularly struck by the even, amber tint of her face and the bluish lights in her black hair. . . . I bent down from my horse and warmly pressed her little hand.

"Good-bye, Sara . . . mind you come."

"Yes."

She went home; I told the sergeant to follow me with the party, and galloped off.

The next day I got up very early, dressed, and went out of the tent. It was a glorious morning; the sun had just risen and every blade of grass was sparkling in the dew and the crimson glow. I clambered on to a high breastwork, and sat down on the edge of an embrasure. Below me a stout, cast-iron cannon stuck out its black muzzle towards the open country. I looked carelessly about me . . . and all at once caught sight of a bent figure in a grey wrapper, a hundred paces from me. I recognised Girshel. He stood without moving for a long while in one place, then suddenly ran a little on one side, looked hurriedly and furtively round . . . uttered a cry, squatted down, cautiously craned his neck and began looking round again and listening. I could see all his actions very clearly. He put his hand into his bosom, took out a scrap of paper and a pencil, and began writing or drawing something. Girshel continually stopped started like a hare, attentively scrutinised everything around him, and seemed to be sketching our camp. More than once he hid his scrap of paper, half

closed his eyes, sniffed at the air, and again set to work. At last, the Jew squatted down on the grass, took off his slipper and stuffed the paper in it; but he had not time to regain his legs, when suddenly, ten steps from him, there appeared from behind the slope of an earthwork the whiskered countenance of the sergeant Siliavka, and gradually the whole of his long clumsy figure rose up from the ground. The Jew stood with his back to him. Siliavka went quickly up to him and laid his heavy paw on his shoulder. Girshel seemed to shrink into himself. He shook like a leaf and uttered a feeble cry, like a hare's. Siliavka addressed him threateningly, and seized him by the collar. I could not hear their conversation, but from the despairing gestures of the Jew, and his supplicating appearance, I began to guess what it was. The Jew twice flung himself at the sergeant's feet, put his hand in his pocket, pulled out a torn check handkerchief, untied a knot, and took out gold coins. . . . Siliavka took his offering with great dignity, but did not leave off dragging the Jew by the collar. Girshel made a sudden bound and rushed away; the sergeant sped after him in pursuit. The Jew ran exceedingly well; his legs, clad in blue stockings, flashed by, really very rapidly; but Siliavka after a short run caught the crouching Jew, made him stand up, and carried him in his arms straight to the camp. I got up and went to meet him.

"Ah! your honour!" bawled Siliavka,— "it's a spy I'm bringing you—a spy! . . ." The sturdy Little-Russian was streaming with perspiration. "Stop that wriggling, devilish Jew—now then . . . you wretch! you 'd better look out, I'll throttle you!"

The luckless Girshel was feebly prodding his elbows into Siliavka's chest, and feebly kicking. . . . His eyes were rolling convulsively . . .

"What's the matter?" I questioned Siliavka.

"If your honour'll be so good as to take the slipper off his right foot,—I can't get at it." He was still holding the Jew in his arms.

I took off the slipper, took out of it a carefully folded piece of paper, unfolded it, and found an accurate map of our camp. On the margin were a number of notes written in a fine hand in the Jews' language.

Meanwhile Siliavka had set Girshel on his legs. The Jew opened his eyes, saw me, and flung himself on his knees before me.

Without speaking, I showed him the paper.

"What's this?"

"it's—nothing, your honour. I was only. . . ." His voice broke.

"Are you a spy?"

He did not understand me, muttered disconnected words, pressed my knees in terror . . .

"Are you a spy?"

"I!" he cried faintly, and shook his head. "How could I? I never did; I'm not at all. It's not possible; utterly impossible. I'm ready—I'll—this minute—I've money to give . . . I'll pay for it," he whispered, and closed his eyes.

The smoking-cap had slipped back on to his neck; his reddish hair was soaked with cold sweat, and hung in tails; his lips were blue and working convulsively; his brows were contracted painfully; his face was drawn . . .

Soldiers came up round us. I had at first meant to give Girshel a good fright, and to tel Siliavka to hold his tongue, but now the affair had become public, and could not escape "the cognisance of the authorities."

"Take him to the general," I said to the sergeant.

"Your honour, your honour!" the Jew shrieked in a voice of

despair. "I am not guilty . . . not guilty. . . . Tell him to let me go, tell him . . ."

"His Excellency will decide about that," said Siliavka. "Come along."

"Your honour!" the Jew shrieked after me—"tell him! have mercy!"

His shriek tortured me; I hastened my pace. Our general was a man of German extraction, honest and good-hearted, but strict in his adherence to military discipline. I went into the little house that had been hastily put up for him, and in a few words explained the reason of my visit. I knew the severity of the military regulations, and so I did not even pronounce the word "spy," but tried to put the whole affair before him as something quite trifling and not worth attention. But, unhappily for Girshel, the general put doing his duty higher than pity.

"You, young man," he said to me in his broken Russian, "inexperienced are. You in military matters yet inexperienced are. The matter, of which you to me reported have, is important, very important. . . . And where is this man who taken was? this Jew? where is he?"

I went out and told them to bring in the Jew. They brought in the Jew. The wretched creature could scarcely stand up.

"Yes," pronounced the general, turning to me; "and where's the plan which on this man found was?"

I handed him the paper. The general opened it, turned away again, screwed up his eyes, frowned . . .

"This is most as-ton-ish-ing . . ." he said slowly. "Who arrested him?"

"I, your Excellency!" Siliavka jerked out sharply.

"Ah! good! good! . . . Well, my good man, what do you say in your defence?"

"Your . . . your . . . your Excellency," stammered Girshel, "I . . . indeed. . . your Excellency . . . I'm not guilty . . . your Excellency; ask his honour the officer . . . I'm an agent, your Excellency, an honest agent."

"He ought to be cross-examined," the general murmured in an undertone, wagging his head gravely. "Come, how do you explain this, my friend?"

"I'm not guilty, your Excellency, I'm not guilty."

"That is not probable, however. You were—how is it said in Russian?—taken on the fact, that is, in the very facts!"

"Hear me, your Excellency; I am not guilty."

"You drew the plan? you are a spy of the enemy?"

"It wasn't me!" Girshel shrieked suddenly; "not I, your Excellency!"

The general looked at Siliavka.

"Why, he's raving, your Excellency. His honour the officer here took the plan out of his slipper."

The general looked at me. I was obliged to nod assent.

"You are a spy from the enemy, my good man . . ."

"Not I . . . not I . . ." whispered the distracted Jew.

"You have the enemy with similar information before provided? Confess . . ."

"How could I?"

"You will not deceive me, my good man. Are you a spy?"

The Jew closed his eyes, shook his head, and lifted the skirts of his gown.

"Hang him," the general pronounced expressively after a brief silence, "according to the law. Where is Mr. Fiodor Schliekelmann?"

They ran to fetch Schliekelmann, the general's adjutant. Girshel began to turn greenish, his mouth fell open, his eyes seemed



starting out of his head. The adjutant came in. The general gave him the requisite instructions. The secretary showed his sickly, pock-marked face for an instant. Two or three officers peeped into the room inquisitively.

"Have pity, your Excellency," I said to the general in German as best I could; "let him off . . ."

"You, young man," he answered me in Russian, "I was saying to you, are inexperienced, and therefore I beg you silent to be, and me no more to trouble."

Girshel with a shriek dropped at the general's feet.

"Your Excellency, have mercy; I will never again, I will not, your Excellency; I have a wife . . . your Excellency, a daughter . . . have mercy . . ."

"It's no use!"

"Truly, your Excellency, I am guilty . . . it's the first time, your Excellency, the first time, believe me!"

"You furnished no other documents?"

"The first time, your Excellency. . . . my wife . . . my children . . . have mercy . . ."

"But you are a spy."

"My wife . . . your Excellency . . . my children . . ."

The general felt a twinge, but there was no getting out of it.

"According to the law, hang the Hebrew," he said constrainedly, with the air of a man forced to do violence to his heart, and sacrifice his better feelings to inexorable duty—"hang him! Fiodor Karlitch, I beg you to draw up a report of the occurrence . . ."

A horrible change suddenly came over Girshel. Instead of the ordinary timorous alarm peculiar to the Jewish nature, in his face was reflected the horrible agony that comes before death. He writhed like a wild beast trapped, his mouth stood open, there was a hoarse rattle in his throat, he positively leapt up and down,

convulsively moving his elbows. He had on only one slipper; they had forgotten to put the other on again . . . his gown fell open . . . his cap had fallen off . . .

We all shuddered; the general stopped speaking.

"Your Excellency," I began again, "pardon this wretched creature."

"Impossible! It is the law," the general replied abruptly, and not without emotion, "for a warning to others."

"For pity's sake . . ."

"Mr. Cornet, be so good as to return to your post," said the general, and he motioned me imperiously to the door.

I bowed and went out. But seeing that in reality I had no post anywhere, I remained at no great distance from the general's house. Two minutes later Girshel made his appearance, conducted by Siliavka and three soldiers. The poor Jew was in a state of stupefaction, and could hardly move his legs. Siliavka went by me to the camp, and soon returned with a rope in his hands. His coarse but not ill-natured face wore a look of strange, exasperated commiseration. At the sight of the rope the Jew flung up his arms, sat down, and burst into sobs. The soldiers stood silently about him, and stared grimly at the earth. I went up to Girshel, addressed him; he sobbed like a baby, and did not even look at me. With a hopeless gesture I went to my tent, flung myself on a rug, and closed my eyes. . . .

Suddenly some one ran hastily and noisily into my tent. I raised my head and saw Sara: she looked beside herself. She rushed up to me, and clutched at my hands.

"Come along, come along," she insisted breathlessly.

"Where? what for? let us stop here."

"To father, to father, quick . . . save him . . . save him!"

"To what father?"

"My father; they are going to hang him . . ."

"What! is Girshel . . .?"

"My father . . . I'll tell you all about it later," she added, wringing her hands in despair: "only come . . . come . . ."

We ran out of the tent. In the open ground, on the way to a solitary birch-tree, we could see a group of soldiers. . . . Sara pointed to them without speaking. . . .

"Stop," I said to her suddenly: "where are we running to? The soldiers won't obey me."

Sara still pulled me after her. . . . I must confess, my head was going round.

"But listen, Sara," I said to her; "what sense is there in running here? It would be better for me to go to the general again; let's go together; who knows, we may persuade him."

Sara suddenly stood still and gazed at me, as though she were crazy.

"Understand me, Sara, for God's sake. I can't do anything for your father, but the general can. Let's go to him."

"But meanwhile they'll hang him," she moaned. . . .

I looked round. The secretary was standing not far off.

"Ivanov," I called to him; "run, please, over there to them, tell them to wait a little, say I've gone to petition the general."

"Yes, sir."

Ivanov ran off.

We were not admitted to the general's presence. In vain I begged, persuaded, swore even, at last . . . in vain, poor Sara tore her hair and rushed at the sentinels; they would not let us pass.

Sara looked wildly round, clutched her head in both hands, and ran at breakneck pace towards the open country, to her father. I followed her. Every one stared at us, wondering.

We ran up to the soldiers. They were standing in a ring, and

picture it, gentlemen! they were laughing, laughing at poor Girshel. I flew into a rage and shouted at them. The Jew saw us and fell on his daughter's neck. Sara clung to him passionately.

The poor wretch imagined he was pardoned . . . He was just beginning to thank me . . . I turned away.

"Your honour," he shrieked and wrung his hands; "I'm not pardoned?"

I did not speak.

"No?"

"No."

"Your honour," he began muttering; "look, your honour, look . . . she, this girl, see—you know—she's my daughter."

"I know," I answered, and turned away again. "Your honour," he shrieked, "I never went away from the tent! I wouldn't for anything . . ."

He stopped, and closed his eyes for an instant. . . . "I wanted your money, your honour. I must own . . . but not for anything . . ."

I was silent. Girshel was loathsome to me, and she too, his accomplice. . . .

"But now, if you save me," the Jew articulated in a whisper, "I'll command her . . . I . . . do you understand? . . . everything . . . I'll go to every length. . . ."

He was trembling like a leaf, and looking about him hurriedly. Sara silently and passionately embraced him.

The adjutant came up to us.

"Cornet," he said to me; "his Excellency has given me orders to place you under arrest. And you . . ." he motioned the soldiers to the Jew . . . "quickly."

Siliavka went up to the Jew.

"Fiodor Karlitch," I said to the adjutant (five soldiers had

come with him); "tell them, at least, to take away that poor girl. . . ."

"Of course. Certainly."

The unhappy girl was scarcely conscious. Girshel was muttering something to her in Yiddish. . . .

The soldiers with difficulty freed Sara from her father's arms, and carefully carried her twenty steps away. But all at once she broke from their arms and rushed towards Girshel. . . . Siliavka stopped her. Sara pushed him away; her face was covered with a faint flush, her eyes flashed, she stretched out her arms.

"So may you be accursed," she screamed in German; "accursed, thrice accursed, you and all the hateful breed of you, with the curse of Dathan and Abiram, the curse of poverty and sterility and violent, shameful death! May the earth open under your feet, godless, pitiless, bloodthirsty dogs. . . ."

Her head dropped back . . . she fell to the ground. . . . They lifted her up and carried her away.

The soldiers took Girshel under his arms. I saw then why it was they had been laughing at the Jew when I ran up from the camp with Sara. He was really ludicrous, in spite of all the horror of his position. The intense anguish of parting with life, his daughter, his family, showed itself in the Jew in such strange and grotesque gesticulations, shrieks, and wriggles that we all could not help smiling, though it was horrible—intensely horrible to us too. The poor wretch was half dead with terror. . . .

"Oy! oy! oy!" he shrieked: "oy . . . wait! I've something to tell you . . . a lot to tell you. Mr. Under-sergeant, you know me. I'm an agent, an honest agent. Don't hold me; wait a minute, a little minute, a tiny minute—wait! Let me go; I'm a poor Hebrew. Sara . . . where is Sara? Oh, I know, she's at his honour the quarter-lieutenant's." (God knows why he bestowed such an

unheard-of grade upon me.) "Your honour the quarter-lieutenant, I'm not going away from the tent." (The soldiers were taking hold of Girshel . . . he uttered a deafening shriek, and wriggled out of their hands.) "Your Excellency, have pity on the unhappy father of a family. I'll give you ten golden pieces, fifteen I'll give, your Excellency! . . ." (They dragged him to the birch-tree.) "Spare me! have mercy! your honour the quarter-lieutenant! your Excellency, the general and commander-in-chief!"

They put the noose on the Jew. . . I shut my eyes and rushed away.

I remained for a fortnight under arrest, I was told that the widow of the luckless Girshel came to fetch away the clothes of the deceased. The general ordered a hundred roubles to be given to her. Sara I never saw again. I was wounded; I was taken to the hospital, and by the time I was well again, Dantzic had surrendered, and I joined my regiment on the banks of the Rhine.

1846.



## Three Portraits

“Neighbours” constitute one of the most serious drawbacks of life in the country. I knew a country gentleman of the Vologodsky district, who used on every suitable occasion to repeat the following words, “Thank God, I have no neighbours,” and I confess I could not help envying that happy mortal. My own little place is situated in one of the most thickly peopled provinces of Russia. I am surrounded by a vast number of dear neighbours, from highly respectable and highly respected country gentlemen, attired in ample frockcoats and still more ample waistcoats, down to regular loafers, wearing jackets with long sleeves and a so-called shooting-bag on their back. In this crowd of gentlefolks I chanced, however, to discover one very pleasant fellow. He had served in the army, had retired and settled for good and all in the country. According to his story, he had served for two years in the B—— regiment. But I am totally unable to comprehend how that man could have performed any sort of duty, not merely for two years, but even for two days. He was born “for a life of peace and country calm,” that is to say, for lazy, careless vegetation, which, I note parenthetically, is not without great and inexhaustible charms. He possessed a very fair property, and without giving too much thought to its management, spent about ten thousand roubles a year, had obtained an excellent cook—my friend was fond of good fare—and ordered too from Moscow all the newest French books and magazines. In Russian he read nothing but the reports of his bailiff and that with great difficulty. He used, when he did not go out shooting,

to wear a dressing-gown from morning till dinner-time and at dinner. He would look through plans of some sort, or go round to the stables or to the threshing barn, and joke with the peasant women, who, to be sure, in his presence wielded their flails in leisurely fashion. After dinner my friend would dress very carefully before the looking-glass, and drive off to see some neighbour possessed of two or three pretty daughters. He would flirt serenely and unconcernedly with one of them, play blind-man's-buff with them, return home rather late and promptly fall into a heroic sleep. He could never be bored, for he never gave himself up to complete inactivity; and in the choice of occupations he was not difficult to please, and was amused like a child with the smallest trifle. On the other hand, he cherished no particular attachment to life, and at times, when he chanced to get a glimpse of the track of a wolf or a fox, he would let his horse go at full gallop over such ravines that to this day I cannot understand how it was he did not break his neck a hundred times over. He belonged to that class of persons who inspire in one the idea that they do not know their own value, that under their appearance of indifference strong and violent passions lie concealed. But he would have laughed in one's face if he could have guessed that one cherished such an opinion of him. And indeed I must own I believe myself that even supposing my friend had had in youth some strong impulse, however vague, towards what is so sweetly called "higher things," that impulse had long, long ago died out. He was rather stout and enjoyed superb health. In our day one cannot help liking people who think little about themselves, because they are exceedingly rare . . . and my friend had almost forgotten his own personality. I fancy, though, that I have said too much about him already, and my prolixity is the more uncalled for as he is not the hero of my story. His name was Piotr

Fedorovitch Lutchinov.

One autumn day there were five of us, ardent sportsmen, gathered together at Piotr Fedorovitch's. We had spent the whole morning out, had run down a couple of foxes and a number of hares, and had returned home in that supremely agreeable frame of mind which comes over every well-regulated person after a successful day's shooting. It grew dusk. The wind was frolicking over the dark fields and noisily swinging the bare tops of the birches and lime-trees round Lutchinov's house. We reached the house, got off our horses. . . . On the steps I stood still and looked round: long storm-clouds were creeping heavily over the grey sky; a dark-brown bush was writhing in the wind, and murmuring plaintively; the yellow grass helplessly and forlornly bowed down to the earth; flocks of thrushes were fluttering in the mountain-ashes among the bright, flame-coloured clusters of berries. Among the light brittle twigs of the birch-trees blue-tits hopped whistling. In the village there was the hoarse barking of dogs. I felt melancholy . . . but it was with a genuine sense of comfort that I walked into the dining-room. The shutters were closed; on a round table, covered with a tablecloth of dazzling whiteness, amid cut-glass decanters of red wine, there were eight lighted candles in silver candlesticks; a fire glowed cheerfully on the hearth, and an old and very stately-looking butler, with a huge bald head, wearing an English dress, stood before another table on which was pleasingly conspicuous a large soup-tureen, encircled by light savoury-smelling steam. In the hall we passed by another venerable man, engaged in icing champagne—"according to the strictest rules of the art." The dinner was, as is usual in such cases, exceedingly pleasant. We laughed and talked of the incidents of the day's shooting, and recalled with enthusiasm two glorious "runs." After dining pretty heartily, we settled

comfortably into ample arm-chairs round the fire; a huge silver bowl made its appearance on the table, and in a few minutes the white flame of the burning rum announced our host's agreeable intention "to concoct a punch." Piotr Fedoritch was a man of some taste; he was aware, for instance, that nothing has so fatal an influence on the fancy as the cold, steady, pedantic light of a lamp, and so he gave orders that only two candles should be left in the room. Strange half-shadows quivered on the walls, thrown by the fanciful play of the fire in the hearth and the flame of the punch . . . a soft, exceedingly agreeable sense of soothing comfort replaced in our hearts the somewhat boisterous gaiety that had reigned at dinner.

Conversations have their destinies, like books, as the Latin proverb says, like everything in the world. Our conversation that evening was particularly many-sided and lively. From details it passed to rather serious general questions, and lightly and casually came back to the daily incidents of life. . . . After chatting a good deal, we suddenly all sank into silence. At such times they say an angel of peace is flying over.

I cannot say why my companions were silent, but I held my tongue because my eyes had suddenly come to rest on three dusty portraits in black wooden frames. The colours were rubbed and cracked in places, but one could still make out the faces. The portrait in the centre was that of a young woman in a white gown with lace ruffles, her hair done up high, in the style of the eighties of last century. On her right, upon a perfectly black background, there stood out the full, round face of a good-natured country gentleman of five-and-twenty, with a broad, low brow, a thick nose, and a good-humoured smile. The French powdered coiffure was utterly out of keeping with the expression of his Slavonic face. The artist had portrayed him wearing a long loose

coat of crimson colour with large paste buttons; in his hand he was holding some unlikely-looking flower. The third portrait, which was the work of some other more skilful hand, represented a man of thirty, in the green uniform, with red facings, of the time of Catherine, in a white shirt, with a fine cambric cravat. One hand leaned on a gold-headed cane, the other lay on his shirt front. His dark, thinnish face was full of insolent haughtiness. The fine long eyebrows almost grew together over the pitch-black eyes, about the thin, scarcely discernible lips played an evil smile.

"Why do you keep staring at those faces?" Piotr Fedoritch asked me.

"Oh, I don't know!" I answered, looking at him.

"Would you care to hear a whole story about those three persons?"

"Oh, please tell it," we all responded with one voice.

Piotr Fedoritch got up, took a candle, carried it to the portraits, and in the tone of a showman at a wild beast show, "Gentlemen!" he boomed, "this lady was the adopted child of my great-grandfather, Olga Ivanovna N.N., called Lutchinov, who died forty years ago unmarried. This gentleman," he pointed to the portrait of a man in uniform, "served as a lieutenant in the Guards, Vassily Ivanovitch Lutchinov, expired by the will of God in the year seventeen hundred and ninety. And this gentleman, to whom I have not the honour of being related, is a certain Pavel Afanasiitch Rogatchov, serving nowhere, as far as I'm aware. . . . Kindly take note of the hole in his breast, just on the spot where the heart should be. That hole, you see, a regular three-sided hole, would be hardly likely to have come there by chance. . . . Now," he went on in his usual voice, "kindly seat yourselves, arm yourselves with patience, and listen."



Gentlemen! (he began) I come of a rather old family. I am not proud of my descent, seeing that my ancestors were all fearful prodigals. Though that reproach cannot indeed be made against my great-grandfather, Ivan Andreevitch Lutchinov; on the contrary, he had the character of being excessively careful, even miserly—at any rate, in the latter years of his life. He spent his youth in Petersburg, and lived through the reign of Elizabeth. In Petersburg he married, and had by his wife, my great-grandmother, four children, three sons, Vassily, Ivan, and Pavel, my grandfather, and one daughter, Natalia. In addition, Ivan Andreevitch took into his family the daughter of a distant relation, a nameless and destitute orphan—Olga Ivanovna, of whom I spoke just now. My great-grandfather's serfs were probably aware of his existence, for they used (when nothing particularly unlucky occurred) to send him a trifling rent, but they had never seen his face. The village of Lutchinovka, deprived of the bodily presence of its lord, was flourishing exceedingly, when all of a sudden one fine morning a cumbrous old family coach drove into the village and stopped before the elder's hut. The peasants, alarmed at such an unheard-of occurrence, ran up and saw their master and mistress and all their young ones, except the eldest, Vassily, who was left behind in Petersburg. From that memorable day down to the very day of his death, Ivan Andreevitch never left Lutchinovka. He built himself a house, the very house in which I have the pleasure of conversing with you at this moment. He built a church too, and began living the life of a country gentleman. Ivan Andreevitch was a man of immense height, thin, silent, and very deliberate in all his movements. He never wore a dressing-gown, and no one but his valet had ever seen him without powder. Ivan Andreevitch usually walked with his hands clasped behind his back, turning his head at each step. Every day



he used to walk in a long avenue of lime-trees, which he had planted with his own hand; and before his death he had the pleasure of enjoying the shade of those trees. Ivan Andreevitch was exceedingly sparing of his words; a proof of his taciturnity is to be found in the remarkable fact that in the course of twenty years he had not said a single word to his wife, Anna Pavlovna. His relations with Anna Pavlovna altogether were of a very curious sort. She directed the whole management of the household; at dinner she always sat beside her husband—he would mercilessly have chastised any one who had dared to say a disrespectful word to her—and yet he never spoke to her, never touched her hand. Anna Pavlovna was a pale, broken-spirited woman, completely crushed. She prayed every day on her knees in church, and she never smiled. There was a rumour that they had formerly, that is, before they came into the country, lived on very cordial terms with one another. They did say too that Anna Pavlovna had been untrue to her matrimonial vows; that her conduct had come to her husband's knowledge. . . . Be that as it may, any way Ivan Andreevitch, even when dying, was not reconciled to her. During his last illness, she never left him; but he seemed not to notice her. One night, Anna Pavlovna was sitting in Ivan Andreevitch's bedroom—he suffered from sleeplessness—a lamp was burning before the holy picture. My grandfather's servant, Yuditich, of whom I shall have to say a few words later, went out of the room. Anna Pavlovna got up, crossed the room, and sobbing flung herself on her knees at her husband's bedside, tried to say something—stretched out her hands . . . Ivan Andreevitch looked at her, and in a faint voice, but resolutely, called, "Boy!" The servant went in; Anna Pavlovna hurriedly rose, and went back, tottering, to her place.

Ivan Andreevitch's children were exceedingly afraid of him.

They grew up in the country, and were witnesses of Ivan Andreevitch's strange treatment of his wife. They all loved Anna Pavlovna passionately, but did not dare to show their love. She seemed of herself to hold aloof from them. . . . You remember my grandfather, gentlemen: to the day of his death he always walked on tiptoe, and spoke in a whisper . . . such is the force of habit! My grandfather and his brother, Ivan Ivanovitch, were simple, good-hearted people, quiet and depressed. My grand'tante Natalia married, as you are aware, a coarse, dull-witted man, and all her life she cherished an unutterable, slavish, sheep-like passion for him. But their brother Vassily was not of that sort. I believe I said that Ivan Andreevitch had left him in Petersburg. He was then twelve. His father confided him to the care of a distant kinsman, a man no longer young, a bachelor, and a terrible Voltairean.

Vassily grew up and went into the army. He was not tall, but was well-built and exceedingly elegant; he spoke French excellently, and was renowned for his skilful swordsmanship. He was considered one of the most brilliant young men of the beginning of the reign of Catherine. My father used often to tell me that he had known more than one old lady who could not refer to Vassily Ivanovitch Lutchinov without heartfelt emotion. Picture to yourselves a man endowed with exceptional strength of will, passionate and calculating, persevering and daring, reserved in the extreme, and—according to the testimony of all his contemporaries—fascinatingly, captivately attractive. He had no conscience, no heart, no **principle**, though no one could have called him positively a **bad-hearted** man. He was vain, but knew how to disguise his vanity, and passionately cherished his independence. When Vassily Ivanovitch would half close his black eyes, smiling affectionately when he wanted to fascinate any one, they say

it was impossible to resist him; and even people, thoroughly convinced of the coldness and hardness of his heart, were more than once vanquished by the bewitching power of his personal influence. He served his own interests devotedly, and made other people, too, work for his advantage; and he was always successful in everything, because he never lost his head, never disdained using flattery as a means, and well understood how to use it.

Ten years after Ivan Andreevitch had settled in the country, he came for a four months' visit to Lutchinovka, a brilliant officer of the Guards, and in that time succeeded positively in turning the head of the grim old man, his father. Strange to say, Ivan Andreevitch listened with enjoyment to his sons's stories of some of his conquests. His brothers were speechless in his presence, and admired him as a being of a higher order. And Anna Pavlovna herself became almost fonder of him than any of her other children who were so sincerely devoted to her.

Vassily Ivanovitch had come down into the country primarily to visit his people, but also with the second object of getting as much money as possible from his father. He lived sumptuously in the glare of publicity in Petersburg, and had made a mass of debts. He had no easy task to get round his father's miserliness, and though Ivan Andreevitch gave him on this one visit probably far more money than he gave all his other children together during twenty years spent under his roof, Vassily followed the well-known Russian rule, "Get what you can!"

Ivan Andreevitch had a servant called Yuditch, just such another tall, thin, taciturn person as his master. They say that this man Yuditch was partly responsible for Ivan Andreevitch's strange behaviour with Anna Pavlovna; they say he discovered my great-grandmother's guilty intrigue with one of my great-grandfather's dearest friends. Most likely Yuditch deeply regretted his ill-timed

jealousy, for it would be difficult to conceive a more kind-hearted man. His memory is held in veneration by all my house-serfs to this day. My great-grandfather put unbounded confidence in Yuditch. In those days landowners used to have money, but did not put it into the keeping of banks, they kept it themselves in chests, under their floors, and so on. Ivan Andreevitch kept all his money in a great wrought-iron coffer, which stood under the head of his bed. The key of this coffer was intrusted to Yuditch. Every evening as he went to bed Ivan Andreevitch used to bid him open the coffer in his presence, used to tap in turn each of the tightly filled bags with a stick, and every Saturday he would untie the bags with Yuditch, and carefully count over the money. Vassily heard of all these doings, and burned with eagerness to overhaul the sacred coffer. In the course of five or six days he had softened Yuditch, that is, he had worked on the old man till, as they say, he worshipped the ground his young master trod on. Having thus duly prepared him, Vassily put on a care-worn and gloomy air, for a long while refused to answer Yuditch's questions, and at last told him that he had lost at play, and should make an end of himself if he could not get money somehow. Yuditch broke into sobs, flung himself on his knees before him, begged him to think of God, not to be his own ruin. Vassily locked himself in his room without uttering a word. A little while after he heard some one cautiously knocking at his door; he opened it, and saw in the doorway Yuditch pale and trembling, with the key in his hand. Vassily took in the whole position at a glance. At first, for a long while, he refused to take it. With tears Yuditch repeated, "Take it, your honour, graciously take it!" . . . Vassily at last agreed. This took place on Monday. The idea occurred to Vassily to replace the money taken out with broken bits of crockery. He reckoned on Ivan Andreevitch's tap-

ping the bags with his stick, and not noticing the hardly perceptible difference in the sound, and by Saturday he hoped to obtain and to replace the sum in the coffer. As he planned, so he did. His father did not, in fact, notice anything. But by Saturday Vassily had not procured the money; he had hoped to win the sum from a rich neighbour at cards, and instead of that, he lost it all. Meantime, Saturday had come; it came at last to the turn of the bags filled with broken crocks. Picture, gentlemen, the amazement of Ivan Andreevitch!

"What does this mean?" he thundered.

Yuditch was silent.

"You stole the money?"

"No, sir."

"Then some one took the key from you?"

"I didn't give the key to anyone."

"Not to any one? Well then, you are the thief. Confess!"

"I am not a thief, Ivan Andreevitch."

"Where the devil did these potsherds come from then? So you're deceiving me! For the last time I tell you—confess!"

Yuditch bowed his head and folded his hands behind his back.

"Hi, lads!" shrieked Ivan Andreevitch in a voice of frenzy. "A stick!"

"What, beat . . . me?" murmured Yuditch.

"Yes, indeed! Are you any better than the rest? You are a thief! O Yuditch! I never expected such dishonesty of you!"

"I have grown grey in your service, Ivan Andreevitch," Yuditch articulated with effort.

"What have I to do with your grey hairs? Damn you and your service!"

The servants came in.

"Take him, do, and give it him thoroughly." Ivan Andreevitch's



lips were white and twitching. He walked up and down the room like a wild beast in a small cage.

The servants did not dare to carry out his orders.

"Why are you standing still, children of Ham? Am I to undertake him myself, eh?"

Yuditch was moving towards the door . . .

"Stay!" screamed Ivan Andreevitch. "Yuditch, for the last time I tell you, I beg you, Yuditch, confess!"

"I can't!" moaned Yuditch.

"Then take him, the sly old fox! Flog him to death! His blood be on my head!" thundered the infuriated old man. The flogging began. . . . The door suddenly opened, and Vassily came in. He was almost paler than his father, his hands were shaking, his upper lip was lifted, and laid bare a row of even, white teeth.

"I am to blame," he said in a thick but resolute voice. "I took the money."

The servants stopped.

"You! what? you, Vaska! without Yuditch's consent?"

"No!" said Yuditch, "with my consent. I gave Vassily Ivanovitch the key of my own accord. Your honour, Vassily Ivanovitch! why does your honour trouble?"

"So this is the thief!" shrieked Ivan Andreevitch. "Thanks, Vassily, thanks! But, Yuditch, I'm not going to forgive you anyway. Why didn't you tell me all about it directly? Hey, you there! why are you standing still? do you too resist my authority? Ah, I'll settle things with you, my pretty gentleman!" he added, turning to Vassily.

The servants were again laying hands on Yuditch. . . .

"Don't touch him!" murmured Vassily through his teeth. The men did not heed him. "Back!" he shrieked and rushed upon them. . . . They stepped back.



"Ah! mutiny!" moaned Ivan Andreevitch, and, raising his stick, he approached his son.

Vassily leaped back, snatched at the handle of his sword, and bared it to half its length. Every one was trembling. Anna Pavlovna, attracted by the noise, showed herself at the door, pale and scared.

A terrible change passed over the face of Ivan Andreevitch. He tottered, dropped the stick, and sank heavily into an arm-chair, hiding his face in both hands. No one stirred, all stood rooted to the spot, Vassily like the rest. He clutched the steel sword-handle convulsively, and his eyes glittered with a weary, evil light. . . .

"Go, all of you . . . all, out," Ivan Andreevitch brought out in a low voice, not taking his hands from his face.

The whole crowd went out. Vassily stood still in the doorway, then suddenly tossed his head, embraced Yuditich, kissed his mother's hand . . . and two hours later he had left the place. He went back to Petersburg.

In the evening of the same day Yuditich was sitting on the steps of the house serfs' hut. The servants were all round him, sympathising with him and bitterly reproaching their young master.

"That's enough, lads," he said to them at last, "give over . . . why do you abuse him? He himself, the young master, I dare say is not very happy at his audacity. . . ."

In consequence of this incident, Vassily never saw his father again. Ivan Andreevitch died without him, and died probably with such a load of sorrow on his heart as God grant none of us may ever know. Vassily Ivanovitch, meanwhile, went into the world, enjoyed himself in his own way, and squandered money recklessly. How he got hold of the money, I cannot tell for certain. He had obtained a French servant, a very smart and intel-

ligent fellow, Bourcier, by name. This man was passionately attached to him and aided him in all his numerous manoeuvres. I do not intend to relate in detail all the exploits of my grand-uncle: he was possessed of such unbounded daring, such serpent-like resource, such inconceivable wiliness, such a fine and ready wit, that I must own I can understand the complete sway that unprincipled person exercised even over the noblest natures.

Soon after his father's death, in spite of his wiliness, Vassily Ivanovitch was challenged by an injured husband. He fought a duel, seriously wounded his opponent, and was forced to leave the capital: he was banished to his estate, and forbidden to leave it. Vassily Ivanovitch was thirty years old. You may easily imagine, gentlemen, with what feelings he left the brilliant life in the capital that he was used to, and came into the country. They say that he got out of the hooded cart several times on the road, flung himself face downwards in the snow and cried. No one in Lutchinovka would have known him as the gay and charming Vassily Ivanovitch they had seen before. He did not talk to any one; went out shooting from morning to night; endured his mother's timid caresses with undisguised impatience, and was merciless in his ridicule of his brothers, and of their wives (they were both married by that time). . . .

I have not so far, I think, told you anything about Olga Ivanovna. She had been brought as a tiny baby to Lutchinovka; she all but died on the road. Olga Ivanovna was brought up, as they say, in the fear of God and her betters. It must be admitted that Ivan Andreevitch and Anna Pavlovna both treated her as a daughter. But there lay hid in her soul a faint spark of that fire which burned so fiercely in Vassily Ivanovitch. While Ivan Andreevitch's own children did not dare even to wonder about the cause of the strange, dumb feud between their parents, Olga

was from her earliest years disturbed and tormented by Anna Pavlovna's position. Like Vassily, she loved independence; any restriction fretted her. She was devoted with her whole soul to her benefactress; old Lutchinov she detested, and more than once, sitting at table, she shot such black looks at him, that even the servant handing the dishes felt uncomfortable. Ivan Andreevitch never noticed these glances, for he never took the slightest notice of his family.

At first Anna Pavlovna had tried to eradicate this hatred, but some bold questions of Olga's forced her to complete silence. The children of Ivan Andreevitch adored Olga, and the old lady too was fond of her, but not with a very ardent affection.

Long continued grieving had crushed all cheerfulness and every strong feeling in that poor woman; nothing is so clear a proof of Vassily's captivating charm as that he had made even his mother love him passionately. Demonstrations of tenderness on the part of children were not in the spirit of the age, and so it is not to be wondered at that Olga did not dare to express her devotion, though she always kissed Anna Pavlovna's hand with special reverence, when she said good-night to her. Twenty years later, Russian girls began to read romances of the class of *The Adventures of Marquis Glagol*, *Fanfan and Lolotta*, *Alezey* or *the Cottage in the Forest*; they began to play the clavichord and to sing songs in the style of the once very well-known:

"Men like butterflies in sunshine

Flutter round us opening blossoms," etc.

But in the seventies of last century (Olga Ivanovna was born in 1757) our country beauties had no notion of such accomplishments. It is difficult for us now to form a clear conception of the Russian miss of those days. We can indeed judge from our grandmothers of the degree of culture of girls of noble family in the

time of Catherine; but how is one to distinguish what they had gradually gained in the course of their long lives from what they were in the days of their youth?

Olga Ivanovna spoke French a little, but with a strong Russian accent: in her day there was as yet no talk of French emigrants. In fact, with all her fine qualities, she was still pretty much of a savage, and I dare say in the simplicity of her heart, she had more than once chastised some luckless servant girl with her own hands. . . .

Some time before Vassily Ivanovitch's arrival, Olga Ivanovna had been betrothed to a neighbour, Pavel Afanasievitch Rogatchov, a very good-natured and straightforward fellow. Nature had forgotten to put any spice of ill-temper into his composition. His own serfs did not obey him, and would sometimes all go off, down to the least of them, and leave poor Rogatchov without any dinner . . . but nothing could trouble the peace of his soul. From his childhood he had been stout and indolent, had never been in the government service; and was fond of going to church and singing in the choir. Look, gentlemen, at this round, good-natured face; glance at this mild, beaming smile . . . don't you really feel it reassuring, yourselves? His father used at long intervals to drive over to Lutchinovka, and on holidays used to bring with him his Pavlusha, whom the little Lutchinovs teased in every possible way. Pavlusha grew up, began driving over to call on Ivan Andreevitch on his own account, fell in love with Olga Ivanovna, and offered her his hand and heart—not to her personally, but to her benefactors. Her benefactors gave their consent. They never even thought of asking Olga Ivanovna whether she liked Rogatchov. In those days, in the words of my grandmother, "such refinements were not the thing." Olga soon got used to her betrothed, however it was impossible not to feel

fond of such a gentle and amiable creature. Rogatchov had received no education whatever; his French consisted of the one word *bonjour*, and he secretly considered even that word improper. But some jocose person had taught him the following lines, as a French song: "Sonitchka, Sonitchka! Ke-voole-voode-mwa—I adore you—me-je-ne-pyoo-pa . . ." This supposed song he always used to hum to himself when he felt in good spirits. His father was also a man of incredible good-nature, always wore a long nankin coat, and whatever was said to him he responded with a smile. From the time of Pavel Afanasievitch's betrothal, both the Rogatchovs, father and son, had been tremendously busy. They had been having their house entirely transformed adding various "galleries," talking in a friendly way with the workmen, encouraging them with drinks. They had not yet completed all these additions by the winter they put off the wedding till the summer. In the summer Ivan Andreevitch died; the wedding was deferred till the following spring. In the winter Vassily Ivanovitch arrived. Rogatchov was presented to him; he received him coldly and contemptuously, and as time went on, he so alarmed him by his haughty behaviour that poor Rogatchov trembled like a leaf at the very sight of him, was tongue-tied and smiled nervously. Vassily once almost annihilated him altogether—by making him a bet, that he, Rogatchov, was not able to stop smiling. Poor Pavel Afanasievitch almost cried with embarrassment, but—actually!—a smile, a stupid, nervous smile refused to leave his perspiring face! Vassily toyed deliberately with the ends of his neckerchief, and looked at him with supreme contempt. Pavel Afanasievitch's father heard too of Vassily's presence, and after an interval of a few days—"for the sake of greater formality"—he sallied off to Lutchinovka with the object of "felicitating our honoured guest on his advent to the halls of



his ancestors." Afanasey Lukitch was famed all over the countryside for his eloquence—that is to say, for his capacity for enunciating without faltering a rather long and complicated speech, with a sprinkling of bookish phrases in it. Alas! on this occasion he did not sustain his reputation; he was even more disconcerted than his son, Pavel Afanasievitch; he mumbled something quite inarticulate, and though he had never been used to taking vodka, he at once drained a glass "to carry things off"—he found Vassily at lunch,—tried at least to clear his throat with some dignity, and did not succeed in making the slightest sound. On their way home, Pavel Afanasievitch whispered to his parent, "Well, father?" Afanasey Lukitch responded angrily also in a whisper, "Don't speak of it!"

The Rogatchovs began to be less frequent visitors at Lutchinovka. Though indeed they were not the only people intimidated by Vassily: he awakened in his own brothers, in their wives, in Anna Pavlovna herself, an instinctive feeling of uneasiness and discomfort . . . they tried to avoid him in every way they could. Vassily must have noticed this, but apparently had no intention of altering his behaviour to them. Suddenly, at the beginning of the spring, he became once more the charming, attractive person they had known of old . . .

The first symptom of this sudden transformation was Vassily's unexpected visit to the Rogatchovs. Afanasey Lukitch, in particular, was fairly disconcerted at the sight of Lutchinov's carriage, but his dismay very quickly vanished. Never had Vassily been more courteous and delightful. He took young Rogatchov by the arm, went with him to look at the new buildings, talked to the carpenters, made some suggestions, with his own hands chopped a few chips off with the axe, asked to be shown Afanasey Lukitch's stud horses, himself trotted them out on a halter, and



altogether so affected the good-hearted children of the steppes by his gracious affability that they both embraced him more than once. At home, too, Vassily managed, in the course of a few days, to turn every one's head just as before. He contrived all sorts of laughable games, got hold of musicians, invited the ladies and gentlemen of the neighbourhood, told the old ladies the scandals of the town in the most amusing way, flirted a little with the young ones, invented unheard-of diversions, fireworks and such things, in short, he put life into every thing and every one. The melancholy, gloomy house of the Lutchinovs was suddenly converted into a noisy, brilliant, enchanted palace of which the whole countryside was talking. This sudden transformation surprised many and delighted all. All sorts of rumours began to be whispered about. Sagacious persons opined that Vassily Ivanovitch had till then been crushed under the weight of some secret trouble, that he saw chances of returning to the capital . . . but the true cause of Vassily Ivanovitch's metamorphosis was guessed by no one.

Olga Ivanovna, gentlemen, was rather pretty; though her beauty consisted rather in the extraordinary softness and freshness of her shape, in the quiet grace of her movements than in the strict regularity of her features. Nature had bestowed on her a certain independence, her bringing up—she had grown up without father or mother—had developed in her reserve and determination. Olga did not belong to the class of quiet and tame-spirited young ladies; but only one feeling had reached its full possibilities in her as yet—hatred for her benefactor. Other more feminine passions might indeed flare up in Olga Ivanovna's heart with abnormal and painful violence . . . but she had not the cold pride, nor the intense strength of will, nor the self-centred egoism, without which any passion passes quickly away.

The first rush of feeling in such half-active, half-passive natures is sometimes extremely violent; but they give way very quickly, especially when it is a question of relentless conformity with accepted principles; they are afraid of consequences. . . . And yet, gentlemen, I will frankly confess, women of that sort always make the strongest impression on me. . . . (At these words the speaker drank a glass of water. Rubbish! rubbish! thought I, looking at his round chin; nothing in the world makes a strong impression on you, my dear fellow!)

Piotr Fedoritch resumed: Gentlemen, I believe in blood, in race. Olga Ivanovna had more blood than, for instance, her foster sister, Natalia. How did this blood show itself, do you ask? Why, in everything; in the lines of her hands, in her lips, in the sound of her voice, in her glance, in her carriage, in her hair, in the very folds of her gown. In all these trifles there lay hid something special, though I am bound to admit that the—how can one express it?—la distinction, which had fallen to Olga Pavlovna's share would not have attracted Vassily's notice had he met her in Petersburg. But in the country, in the wilds, she not only caught his attention, she was positively the sole cause of the transformation of which I have just been speaking.

Consider the position. Vassily Ivanovitch liked to enjoy life; he could not but be bored in the country; his brothers were good-natured fellows, but extremely limited people: he had nothing in common with them. His sister, Natalia, with the assistance of her husband, had brought into the world in the course of three years no less than four babies; between her and Vassily was a perfect gulf. . . . Anna Pavlovna went to church, prayed, fasted, and was preparing herself for death. There remained only Olga—a fresh, shy, pretty girl. . . . Vassily did not notice her at first . . . indeed, who does notice a dependant, an orphan girl kept from charity in

the house? . . . One day, at the very beginning of spring, Vassily was walking about the garden, and with his cane slashing off the heads of the dandelions, those stupid yellow flowers, which come out first in such numbers in the meadows, as soon as they begin to grow green. He was walking in the garden in front of the house he lifted his head, and caught sight of Olga Ivanovna.

She was sitting sideways at the window, dreamily stroking a tabby kitten, who, purring and blinking, nestled on her lap, and with great satisfaction held up her little nose into the rather hot spring sunshine. Olga Ivanovna was wearing a white morning gown, with short sleeves; her bare, pale-pink, girlish shoulders and arms were a picture of freshness and health. A little red cap discreetly restrained her thick, soft, silky curls. Her face was a little flushed she was only just awake. Her slender, flexible neck bent forward so charmingly; there was such seductive negligence, such modesty in the restful pose of her figure, free from corsets, that Vassily Ivanovitch (a great connoisseur!) halted involuntarily and peeped in. It suddenly occurred to him that Olga Ivanovna ought not to be left in her primitive ignorance; that she might with time be turned into a very sweet and charming woman. He stole up to the window, stretched up on tiptoe, and imprinted a silent kiss on Olga Ivanovna's smooth, white arm, a little below the elbow.

Olga shrieked and jumped up, the kitten put its tail in the air and leaped into the garden. Vassily Ivanovitch with a smile kept her by the arm. . . . Olga flushed all over, to her ears; he began to rally her on her alarm . . . invited her to come a walk with him. But Olga Ivanovna became suddenly conscious of the negligence of her attire, and "swifter than the swift red deer" she slipped away into the next room.

The very same day Vassily set off to the Rogatchovs. He was

suddenly happy and light-hearted. Vassily was not in love with Olga, no! the word "love" is not to be used lightly. . . . He had found an occupation, had set himself a task, and rejoiced with the delight of a man of action. He did not even remember that she was his mother's ward, and another man's betrothed. He never for one instant deceived himself; he was fully aware that it was not for her to be his wife. . . . Possibly there was passion to excuse him—not a very elevated nor noble passion, truly, but still a fairly strong and tormenting passion. Of course he was not in love like a boy; he did not give way to vague ecstasies; he knew very well what he wanted and what he was striving for.

Vassily was a perfect master of the art of winning over, in the shortest time, any one however shy or prejudiced against him. Olga soon ceased to be shy with him. Vassily Ivanovitch led her into a new world. He ordered a clavichord for her, gave her music lessons (he himself played fairly well on the flute), read books aloud to her, had long conversations with her. . . . The poor child of the steppes soon had her head turned completely. Vassily dominated her entirely. He knew how to tell her of what had been till then unknown to her, and to tell her in a language she could understand. Olga little by little gained courage to express all her feelings to him: he came to her aid, helped her out with the words she could not find, did not alarm her, at one moment kept her back, at another encouraged her confidences. . . . Vassily busied himself with her education from no disinterested desire to awaken and develop her talents. He simply wanted to draw her a little closer to himself; and he knew too that an innocent, shy, but vain young girl is more easily seduced through the mind than the heart. Even if Olga had been an exceptional being, Vassily would never have perceived it, for he treated her like a child. But as you are aware, gentlemen, there

was nothing specially remarkable in Olga. Vassily tried all he could to work on her imagination, and often in the evening she left his side with such a whirl of new images, phrases and ideas in her head that she could not sleep all night, but lay breathing uneasily and turning her burning cheeks from side to side on the cool pillows, or got up, went to the window and gazed fearfully and eagerly into the dark distance. Vassily filled every moment of her life; she could not think of any one else. As for Rogatchov, she soon positively ceased to notice his existence. Vassily had the tact and shrewdness not to talk to Olga in his presence; but he either made him laugh till he was ready to cry, or arranged some noisy entertainment, a riding expedition, a boating party by night with torches and music—he did not in fact let Pavel Afanasievitch have a chance to think clearly.

But in spite of all Vassily Ivanovitch's tact, Rogatchov dimly felt that he, Olga's betrothed and future husband, had somehow become as it were an outsider to her . . . but in the boundless goodness of his heart, he was afraid of wounding her by reproaches, though he sincerely loved her and prized her affection. When left alone with her, he did not know what to say, and only tried all he could to follow her wishes. Two months passed by. Every trace of self-reliance, of will, disappeared at last in Olga. Rogatchov, feeble and tongue-tied, could be no support to her. She had no wish even to resist the enchantment, and with a sinking heart she surrendered unconditionally to Vassily. . . .

Olga Ivanovna may very likely then have known something of the bliss of love; but it was not for long. Though Vassily—for lack of other occupation—did not drop her, and even attached himself to her and looked after her fondly, Olga herself was so utterly distraught that she found no happiness even in love and



yet could not tear herself away from Vassily. She began to be frightened at everything, did not dare to think, could talk of nothing, gave up reading, and was devoured by misery. Sometimes Vassily succeeded in carrying her along with him and making her forget everything and every one. But the very next day he would find her pale, speechless, with icy hands, and a fixed smile on her lips. . . . There followed a time of some difficulty for Vassily; but no difficulties could dismay him. He concentrated himself like a skilled gambler. He could not in the least rely upon Olga Ivanovna; she was continually betraying herself, turning pale, blushing, weeping . . . her new part was utterly beyond her powers. Vassily toiled for two: in his restless and boisterous gaiety, only an experienced observer could have detected something strained and feverish. He played his brothers, sisters, the Rogatchovs, the neighbours, like pawns at chess. He was everlastingly on the alert. Not a single glance, a single movement, was lost on him, yet he appeared the most heedless of men. Every morning he faced the fray, and every evening he scored a victory. He was not the least oppressed by such a fearful strain of activity. He slept four hours out of the twenty-four, ate very little, and was healthy, fresh, and good-humoured.

Meantime the wedding-day was approaching. Vassily succeeded in persuading Pavel Afanasievitch himself of the necessity of delay. Then he despatched him to Moscow to make various purchases, while he was himself in correspondence with friends in Petersburg. He took all this trouble, not so much from sympathy for Olga Ivanovna, as from a natural bent and liking for bustle and agitation. . . . Besides, he was beginning to be sick of Olga Ivanovna, and more than once after a violent outbreak of passion for her, he would look at her, as he sometimes did at Rogatchov. Lutchinov always remained a riddle to every one.



In the coldness of his relentless soul you felt the presence of a strange almost southern fire, and even in the wildest glow of passion a breath of icy chill seemed to come from the man.

Before other people he supported Olga Ivanovna as before. But when they were alone, he played with her like a cat with a mouse, or frightened her with sophistries, or was wearily, malignantly bored, or again flung himself at her feet, swept her away, like a straw in a hurricane . . . and there was no feigning at such moments in his passion . . . he really was moved himself.

One day, rather late in the evening, Vassily was sitting alone in his room, attentively reading over the last letters he had received from Petersburg, when suddenly he heard a faint creak at the door, and Olga Ivanovna's maid, Palashka, came in.

"What do you want?" Vassily asked her rather crossly.

"My mistress begs you to come to her."

"I can't just now. Go along. . . . Well what are you standing there for?" he went on, seeing that Palashka did not go away.

"My mistress told me to say that she very particularly wants to see you," she said.

"Why, what's the matter?"

"Would your honour please to see for yourself. . . ."

Vassily got up, angrily flung the letters into a drawer, and went in to Olga Ivanovna. She was sitting alone in a corner, pale and passive.

"What do you want?" he asked her, not quite politely.

Olga looked at him and closed her eyes.

"What's the matter? what is it, Olga?"

He took her hand . . . . Olga Ivanovna's hand was cold as ice . . . . She tried to speak . . . and her voice died away. The poor woman had no possible doubt of her condition left her.

Vassily was a little disconcerted. Olga Ivanovna's room was

a couple of steps from Anna Pavlovna's bedroom. Vassily cautiously sat down by Olga, kissed and chafed her hands, comforted her in whispers. She listened to him, and silently, faintly, shuddered. In the doorway stood Palashka, stealthily wiping her eyes. In the next room they heard the heavy, even ticking of the clock, and the breathing of some one asleep. Olga Ivanovna's numbness dissolved at last into tears and stifled sobs. Tears are like a storm; after them one is always calmer. When Olga Ivanovna had quieted down a little, and only sobbed convulsively at intervals, like a child, Vassily knelt before her with caresses and tender promises, soothed her completely, gave her something to drink, put her to bed, and went away. He did not undress all night; wrote two or three letters, burnt two or three papers, took out a gold locket containing the portrait of a black-browed, black-eyed woman with a bold, voluptuous face, scrutinised her features slowly, and walked up and down the room pondering.

Next day, at breakfast, he saw with extreme displeasure poor Olga's red and swollen eyes and pale, agitated face. After breakfast he proposed a stroll in the garden to her. Olga followed Vassily, like a submissive sheep. When two hours afterwards she came in from the garden she quite broke down; she told Anna Pavlovna she was unwell, and went to lie down on her bed. During their walk Vassily had, with a suitable show of remorse, informed her that he was secretly married—he was really as much a bachelor as I am. Olga Ivanovna did not fall into a swoon—people don't fall into swoons except on the stage—but she turned all at once stony, though she herself was so far from hoping to marry Vassily Ivanovitch that she was even afraid to think about it. Vassily had begun to explain to her the inevitableness of her parting from him and marrying Rogatchov. Olga Ivanovna looked at him in dumb horror. Vassily talked in a cool,

business-like, practical way, blamed himself, expressed his regret, but concluded all his remarks with the following words: "There's no going back on the past; we've got to act."

Olga was utterly overwhelmed; she was filled with terror and shame; a dull, heavy despair came upon her; she longed for death, and waited in agony for Vassily's decision.

"We must confess everything to my mother," he said to her at last.

Olga turned deadly pale; her knees shook under her.

"Don't be afraid, don't be afraid," repeated Vassily, "trust to me, I won't desert you . . . I will make everything right . . . rely upon me."

The poor woman looked at him with love . . . yes, with love, and deep, but hopeless devotion.

"I will arrange everything, everything," Vassily said to her at parting . . . and for the last time he kissed her chilly hands. . .

Next morning—Olga Ivanovna had only just risen from her bed—her door opened . . . and Anna Pavlovna appeared in the doorway. She was supported by Vassily. In silence she got as far as an arm-chair, and in silence she sat down. Vassily stood at her side. He looked composed; his brows were knitted and his lips slightly parted. Anna Pavlovna, pale, indignant, angry, tried to speak, but her voice failed her. Olga Ivanovna glanced in horror from her benefactress to her lover, with a terrible sinking at her heart . . . she fell on her knees with a shriek in the middle of the room, and hid her face in her hands.

"Then it's true . . . is it true?" murmured Anna Pavlovna, and bent down to her. . . . "Answer!" she went on harshly, clutching Olga by the arm.

"Mother!" rang out Vassily's brazen voice, "you promised me

not to be hard on her."

"I want . . . confess . . . confess . . . is it true? is it true?"

"Mother . . . remember . . ." Vassily began deliberately.

This one word moved Anna Pavlovna greatly. She leaned back in her chair, and burst into sobs.

Olga Ivanovna softly raised her head, and would have flung herself at the old lady's feet, but Vassily kept her back, raised her from the ground, and led her to another arm-chair. Anna Pavlovna went on weeping and muttering disconnected words. . . .

"Come, mother," began Vassily, "don't torment yourself, the trouble may yet be set right. . . . If Rogatchov . . ."

Olga Ivanovna shuddered, and drew herself up.

"If Rogatchov," pursued Vassily, with a meaning glance at Olga Ivanovna, "imagines that he can disgrace an honourable family with impunity . . ."

Olga Ivanovna was overcome with horror.

"In my house," moaned Anna Pavlovna.

"Calm yourself, mother. He took advantage of her innocence, her youth, he—you wish to say something"—he broke off, seeing that Olga made a movement towards him. . . .

Olga Ivanovna sank back in her chair.

"I will go at once to Rogatchov. I will make him marry her this very day. You may be sure I will not let him make a laughing-stock of us. . . ."

"But . . . Vassily Ivanovitch . . . you . . ." whispered Olga.

He gave her a prolonged, cold stare. She sank into silence again.

"Mother, give me your word not to worry her before I return. Look, she is half dead. And you, too, must rest. Rely upon me; I answer for everything; in any case, wait till I return. I tell you again, don't torture her, or yourself, and trust to me."

He went to the door and stopped. "Mother," said he, "come with me, leave her alone, I beg of you."

Anna Pavlovna got up, went up to the holy picture, bowed down to the ground, and slowly followed her son. Olga Ivanovna, without a word or a movement, looked after them. Vassily turned back quickly, snatched her hand, whispered in her ear, "Rely on me, and don't betray us," and at once withdrew. . . . "Bourcier!" he called, running swiftly down the stairs, "Bourcier!"

A quarter of an hour later he was sitting in his carriage with his valet.

That day the elder Rogatchov was not at home. He had gone to the district town to buy cloth for the liveries of his servants. Pavel Afanasievitch was sitting in his own room, looking through a collection of faded butterflies. With lifted eyebrows and protruding lips, he was carefully, with a pin, turning over the fragile wings of a "night sphinx" moth, when he was suddenly aware of a small but heavy hand on his shoulder. He looked round. Vassily stood before him.

"Good-morning, Vassily Ivanovitch," he said in some amazement.

Vassily looked at him, and sat down on a chair facing him.

Pavel Afanasievitch was about to smile . . . but he glanced at Vassily, and subsided with his mouth open and his hands clasped.

"Tell me, Pavel Afanasievitch," said Vassily suddenly, "are you meaning to dance at your wedding soon?"

"I? . . . soon . . . of course. . . for my part . . . though as you and your sister . . . I, for my part, am ready tomorrow even."

"Very good, very good. You're a very impatient person, Pavel Afanasievitch."

"How so?"

"Let me tell you," pursued Vassily Ivanovitch, getting up, "I



know all; you understand me, and I order you without delay tomorrow to marry Olga."

"Excuse me, excuse me," objected Rogatchov, not rising from his seat; "you order me. I sought Olga Ivanovna's hand of myself and there's no need to give me orders. . . . I confess, Vassily Ivanovitch, I don't quite understand you."

"You don't understand me?"

"No, really, I don't understand you."

"Do you give me your word to marry her tomorrow?"

"Why, mercy on us, Vassily Ivanovitch . . . haven't you yourself put off our wedding more than once? Except for you it would have taken place long ago. And now I have no idea of breaking it off. What is the meaning of your threats, your insistence?"

Pavel Afanasievitch wiped the sweat off his face.

"Do you give me your word? Say yes or no!" Vassily repeated emphatically.

"Excuse me . . . I will . . . but..."

"Very good. Remember then . . . She has confessed everything."

"Who has confessed?"

"Olga Ivanovna."

"Why, what has she confessed?"

"Why, what are you pretending to me for, Pavel Afanasievitch? I'm not a stranger to you."

"What am I pretending? I don't understand you, I don't, I positively don't understand a word. What could Olga Ivanovna confess?"

"What? You are really too much! You know what."

"May God slay me . . ."

"No, I'll slay you, if you don't marry her . . . do you under-



stand?"

"What! . . ." Pavel Afanasievitch jumped up and stood facing Vassily. "Olga Ivanovna . . . you tell me . . ."

"You're a clever fellow, you are, I must own"—Vassily with a smile patted him on the shoulder—"though you do look so innocent."

"Good God! . . . You'll send me out of my mind. . . . What do you mean, explain, for God's sake!"

Vassily bent down and whispered something in his ear.

Rogatchov cried out, "What! . . . I?"

Vassily stamped.

"Olga Ivanovna? Olga? . . ."

"Yes . . . your betrothed . . ."

"My betrothed . . . Vassily Ivanovitch . . . she . . . she . . . Why, I never wish to see her again," cried Pavel Afanasievitch.

"Good-bye to her for ever! What do you take me for? I'm being duped . . . I'm being duped . . . Olga Ivanovna, how wrong of you, have you no shame? . . ." (Tears gushed from his eyes.)

"Thanks, Vassily Ivanovitch, thanks very much . . . I never wish to see her again now! no! no! don't speak of her. . . . Ah, merciful Heavens! to think I have lived to see this! Oh, very well, very well!"

"That's enough nonsense," Vassily Ivanovitch observed coldly. "Remember, you've given me your word: the wedding's tomorrow."

"No, that it won't be! Enough of that, Vassily Ivanovitch. I say again, what do you take me for? You do me too much honour. I'm humbly obliged. Excuse me."

"As you please!" retorted Vassily. "Get your sword."

"Sword . . . what for?"

"What for? . . . I'll show you what for."

Vassily drew out his fine, flexible French sword and bent it a little against the floor.

"You want . . . to fight . . . me?"

"Precisely so."

"But, Vassily Ivanovitch, put yourself in my place! How can I, only think, after what you have just told me. . . . I'm a man of honour, Vassily Ivanovitch, a nobleman."

"You're a nobleman, you're a man of honour, so you'll be so good as to fight with me."

"Vassily Ivanovitch!"

"You are frightened, I think, Mr. Rogatchov."

"I'm not in the least frightened, Vassily Ivanovitch. You thought you would frighten me, Vassily Ivanovitch. I'll scare him, you thought, he's a coward, and he'll agree to anything directly. . . . No, Vassily Ivanovitch, I am a nobleman as much as you are, though I've not had city breeding, and you won't succeed in frightening me into anything, excuse me."

"Very good," retorted Vassily; "where is your sword then?"

"Eroshka!" shouted Pavel Afanasievitch. A servant came in.

"Get me the sword—there—you know, in the loft . . . make haste. . . ."

Eroshka went out. Pavel Afanasievitch suddenly became exceedingly pale, hurriedly took off his dressing-gown, put on a reddish coat with big paste buttons . . . twisted a cravat round his neck . . . Vassily looked at him, and twiddled the fingers of his right hand.

"Well, are we to fight then, Pavel Afanasievitch?"

"Let's fight, if we must fight," replied Rogatchov, and hurriedly buttoned up his shirt.

"Ay, Pavel Afanasievitch, you take my advice, marry her . . . what is it to you . . . And believe me, I'll . . ."

"No, Vassily Ivanovitch," Rogatchov interrupted him. "You'll kill me or maim me, I know, but I'm not going to lose my honour; if I'm to die then I must die."

Froshka came in, and trembling, gave Rogatchov a wretched old sword in a torn leather scabbard. In those days all noblemen wore swords with powder, but in the steppes they only put on powder twice a year. Froshka moved away to the door and burst out crying. Pavel Afanasievitch pushed him out of the room.

"But, Vassily Ivanovitch," he observed with some embarrassment, "I can't fight with you on the spot: allow me to put off our duel till tomorrow. My father is not at home, and it would be as well for me to put my affairs in order to—to be ready for anything."

"I see you're beginning to feel frightened again, sir."

"No, no, Vassily Ivanovitch; but consider yourself . . ."

"Listen!" shouted Lutchinov, "you drive me out of patience. Either give me your word to marry her at once, or fight . . . or I'll thrash you with my cane like a coward—do you understand?"

"Come into the garden," Rogatchov answered through his teeth.

But all at once the door opened, and the old nurse, Efimovna, utterly distracted, broke into the room, fell on her knee, before Rogatchov, and clasped his legs. . . .

"My little master!" she wailed, "my nursling . . . what is it you are about? Will you be the death of us poor wretches, your honour? Sure, he'll kill you, darling! Only you say the word, you say the word, and we'll make an end of him, the insolent fellow—Pavel Afanasievitch, my baby-boy, for the love of God!"

A number of pale, excited faces showed in the door . . . there was even the red beard of the village elder . . .

"Let me go, Efimovna, let me go!" muttered Rogatchov.

"I won't, my own, I won't. What are you about, sir, what are you about? What'll Afanasey Lukitch say? Why, he'll drive us all out of the light of day. . . . Why are you fellows standing still? Take the uninvited guest in hand and show him out of the house, so that not a trace be left of him."

"Rogatchov!" Vassily Ivanovitch shouted menacingly.

"You are crazy, Efimovna, you are shaming me, come, come... said Pavel Afanasievitch. "Go away, go away, in God's name, and you others, off with you, do you hear? . . ."

Vassily Ivanovitch moved swiftly to the open window, took out a small silver whistle, blew lightly . . . Bourcier answered from close by. Lutchinov turned at once to Pavel Afanasievitch.

"What's to be the end of this farce?"

"Vassily Ivanovitch, I will come to you tomorrow. What can I do with this crazy old woman? . . ."

"Oh, I see it's no good wasting words on you," said Vassily, and he swiftly raised his cane . . .

Pavel Afanasievitch broke loose, pushed Efimovna away, snatched up the sword, and rushed through another door into the garden.

Vassily dashed after him. They ran into a wooden summer-house, painted cunningly after the Chinese fashion, shut themselves in, and drew their swords. Rogatchov had once taken lessons in fencing, but now he was scarcely capable of drawing a sword properly. The blades crossed. Vassily was obviously playing with Rogatchov's sword. Pavel Afanasievitch was breathless and pale, and gazed in consternation into Lutchinov's face.

Meanwhile, screams were heard in the garden; a crowd of people were running to the summer-house. Suddenly Rogatchov heard the heart-rending wail of old age . . . he recognised the



voice of his father. Afanasey Lukitch, bare-headed, with dishevelled hair, was running in front of them all, frantically waving his hands. . . .

With a violent and unexpected turn of the blade Vassily sent the sword flying out of Pavel Afanasievitch's hand.

"Marry her, my boy," he said to him: "give over this foolery!"

"I won't marry her," whispered Rogatchov, and he shut his eyes, and shook all over.

Afanasey Lukitch began banging at the door of the summer-house.

"You won't?" shouted Vassily.

Rogatchov shook his head.

"Well, damn you, then!"

Poor Pavel Afanasievitch fell dead: Lutchinov's sword stabbed him to the heart . . . The door gave way; old Rogatchov burst into the summerhouse, but Vassily had already jumped out of window . . .

Two hours later he went into Olga Ivanovna's room . . . She rushed in terror to meet him. . . . He bowed to her in silence; took out his sword and pierced Pavel Afanasievitch's portrait in the place of the heart. Olga shrieked and fell unconscious on the floor . . . Vassily went in to Anna Pavlovna. He found her in the oratory. "Mother," said he, "we are avenged." The poor old woman shuddered and went on praying.

Within a week Vassily had returned to Petersburg, and two years later he came back stricken with paralysis—tongue-tied. He found neither Anna Pavlovna nor Olga living, and soon after died himself in the arms of Yuditich, who fed him like a child, and was the only one who could understand his incoherent stuttering.

1846.

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